

FEAR

FANTASY, HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION

No. 10 OCT 1989

STEPHEN KING'S DARK HALF

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FEAR

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FEAR (Incorporating Movie and The Movie-Makers)

COVER DESIGN & ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER FREY



INTO THE ABYSS

More hype and budget than Batman? That's what some commentators are saying of *The Abyss*, director James Cameron's underwater science fiction epic. But is this behemoth worth the wait? In two special reports Matthew Costello, novelist and author of the movie's *Making of...* book, drops in for some hot water on set and cold criticism at its world premiere.

This is the tale of two cities. One is Gaffney, South Carolina, home of Earl Owensby studios and centre of the peach growing region of the Deep South.

The other is New York... where once again the art-deco movie palace, Radio City Music Hall, came alive with a grand Hollywood opening, with limos and stars galore and rallying to launch a film that - yes, my friends - is clearly troubled.

It has to be a tale of disappointment, of adolescent dreams crashing against adult realities. Perhaps it's a tale of hubris, a bridge too far, and all that damn-the-torpedoes straight-ahead bull feathers.

The story begins with my venturing into *The Abyss*... for purely personal reasons.

I first interviewed producer Gale Ann Hurd - protégé of Roger Corman, King of the Quickies - for an article on *Aliens* for



Amazing Stories. She was married to director James Cameron and together they were responsible for the surprise hit *The Terminator*. The advance word on *Aliens* was very good, and the film went on to more than fulfil everyone's hopes for the sequel (even if it did have a linear, *Rambo*-ish plot. 'Shoot them aliens before they eat us').

So, when news of Cameron's next film, a mammoth underwater epic – er – leaked out, I was very interested. But there was something more that propelled me to wrangle a visit to the set.

My new novel for Berkeley is a big book

"Perhaps it's a tale of hubris, a bridge too far, and all that damn-the-torpedoes straight-ahead bull feathers"

called *Wurm*. And it involved – ahem – some mysterious doings in the Pacific Ocean, two miles down. My plot was special, a really hot – or so I felt – idea. But when I got wind of *The Abyss*, I got nervous.

Maybe Cameron/Hurd were about to film my story.

One way to find out was to go down to the Old South and check it out for myself. And I could write about the visit for my regular film columns in *Analog/Asimov*.

THE BIG SECRET

I landed at the Charlotte, North Carolina airport and was met by a young assistant who had obviously spent a lot of time shuttling visitors between the airport and the 'studio', nearly an hour away. The van-cum-bus rattled further south, towards an overcast Gaffney, and I felt like a Conrad hero, venturing into the heart of darkness.

Of course, Earl Owensby's 'studio' would give anybody pause. It was an abandoned nuclear power plant – it never had gone on line due to some political imbroglio. Think of Kubrick's Vietnam, constructed in the UK, and you get the picture.

It was near the end of a five month shoot, here in the middle of nowhere land. The unit publicist, Anne Marie Stein, escorted me to a barn-like building that housed the food service and a huge wing of DeepCore, the underwater drilling habitat used in the film. It was December, and damned cold for the South.

After lunch, I got a slide show that showed scenes from the movie – while keeping the main plot secret. In the movie – as much as they revealed to me – the underwater hardhats of DeepCore are forced to cooperate with a Navy SEAL team to rescue a nuclear sub perched at an abyss near the Cayman Trench. Before they enter the sub, no one knows what happened to it.

And nobody at Gaffney was telling me



either . . .

I watched an hour of production stills, some very exciting stuff. Then I toured DeepCore, exposed at the bottom of the containment building. It had been buried beneath seven-and-a-half million gallons of water, but now it was exposed. The building floor was painted blue, in preparation for a top-secret blue-screen shot for the next day.

TITANIC DISCOVERIES

I walked over the mock-up of the drilling rig, now rusty from months of use. A black Corvette pulled into the parking lot – James Cameron dashed out, checking with the

"Cameron looked gaunt, as if his time in the main tank – up to five hours a day underwater – didn't allow for any eating"

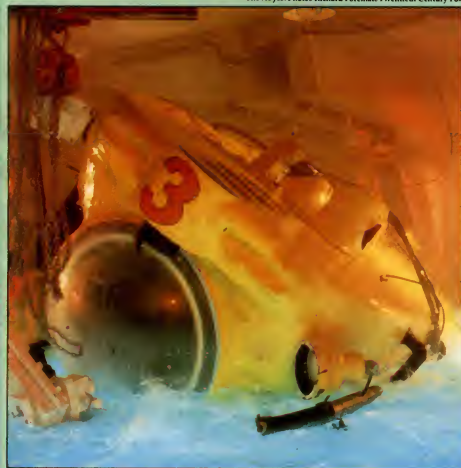
effects people on preparations for the important effects shot. Cameron looked gaunt, as if his time in the main tank – up to five hours a day underwater – didn't allow for any eating.

Then I saw the smaller tank that housed the Sub Bay and Moon Pool, the actual interior of DeepCore. The deck of the surface ship – a land-based mock-up, John Bruno, two-time Academy Award winner, supervised the film's special effects. He showed me his office wall, covered with a storyboard of all the film's effects shots. There was still a lot to be done . . .

Later, walking through other buildings



The Abyss: Photos Richard Foreman/Twentieth Century Fox



and shots, I spotted some nasty homemade cartoons directed at Cameron. There were some bad vibes on the set. I spoke with an actor who played one of the SEALs sent to rescue the downed sub.

He said that—no matter what—he left the set every Friday, to go back to New York.

It was that kind of place.

I got a look at the amazing hardware being used . . . and some of the technical challenges being faced.

"There were some bad vibes on the set"

The film used submersibles supplied by Can-Dive Inc. and small ROVs similar to Jason, the discoverer of the Titanic. A system dubbed Clearcom allowed dialogue to be recorded underwater, and over 40 percent of the finished film takes place underwater, with all the dialogue recorded by the actors, as Cameron directed from a laminated script.

THE BENDS

Light was a problem. Powerful HMI lights were used, for the first time, underwater. The need to make the massive tank black led to an odd solution—tiny polystyrene beads were dumped on the water's surface, blocking out all the light. When I was at the set, the tank was empty, but the beads were still everywhere.

I got a quick look at the actors' quarters, with exposed lighting and cheapjack walls. With only a Big Boy restaurant nearby, this was a hardship set of the first order. For five months they laboured to make Cameron's vision come to life.

"Later, Harris would say, 'It was a bitch . . . It got pretty hairy'"

Some of the actors, notably Ed Harris, were not talking about the experience at all. Later, Harris would say, 'It was a bitch . . . It got pretty hairy'. Harris had to handle extended time underwater, as well as diving in a suit filled with liquid (representing a liquid oxygen combination for ultra-deep dives).

Despite the stress, Cameron's concern was for a safe set. 'I want total control,' he told *The New York Times*. 'I will throw myself back to see if I'm going to hit before I let one of my actors try it.' The decompression tank, located atop the main tank, was always ready.

But—to Cameron's credit—it was never needed.

Cast and crew were preparing to leave in a day or so. Boxes were being taped up. A lottery was being set up for back in LA at the wrap party to win a Spanish Dubloon. And, near sunset, I was driven back to Charlotte. The publicist drove me back and she couldn't tell me the real plot of *The Abyss*. So I told her the story of my novel . . .

'Good idea,' she said. 'And nothing to worry about.'

The Abyss was something else. It was a story that Cameron created when he was seventeen. And now, \$40 million later (though some swear the tab is nearer \$60 million, my friends), that vision was about to be shared with the world.

THE HEART OF DARKNESS



he New York reserved seat premiere of *The Abyss* was a glitzy affair. Radio City has played host to everything from the opening of *King Kong* and Doris Day comedies, all accompanied by the high-kicking Rockettes. It's wonderful and totally ostentatious with its golden ceiling, red carpets and corpulent statuary.

There were handicams everywhere, and celebrities. William Dafoe (*Platoon*), Gregory Hines (*Tap*), Eddie Murphy (*Coming to America*), the singing team Ashford and Simpson, Ed Harris and other stars of *The Abyss*. Gigantic klieg lights crisscrossed, announcing that this was an 'event'.

By now, the plot of *The Abyss* is familiar enough that my commenting on the film won't spoil anyone's fun. But if you've yet to experience the film, feel free to turn the page.

The story turned out to be a retread of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. This time, we get wide-eyed, aquatic aliens who save Ed Harris's Bud Brigman after a three mile tumble into the abyss.

The villain of the piece is a SEAL (Michael Biehn) suffering from a nervous disorder precipitated by the high pressure. He goes buggy, seeing the aliens as commie dupes, and sends a MERV warhead down to the aliens' friends. Harris's Bud Brigman and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, playing his estranged wife, who also happens to be the designer of DeepCore, chase Biehn down in a submersible dog fight.

People cheered when Biehn's paranoid SEAL bit the dust. Weak tea, I thought. He was no madman. He was suffering from the pressure. There was something lacking in his villainy.

EPISODIC MASTERPIECE

The film ends with the aliens saving Brigman, and saving DeepCore, as a gigantic alien structure rises to the surface. Harris and Mastrantonio – united – kiss. Fade to black, as everyone stares at the alien whatever.

Some comments.

Technically, the film is a marvel. Al Godding's underwater photography is moody and atmospheric. Western Space and Marine designed a special that let the divers' faces really be seen in the gloom, the use of the operable submersibles (from Can Dive Inc) and the ROV is exciting.

And, dramatically, there are some wonderful set pieces; episodes in this film are masterful. Make no mistake about it, Cameron is a terrific director. Mastrantonio's drowning scene – and subsequent resuscitation – is phenomenally effective. It boggles the mind to think of that scene being played by a character in whom we really believe.

The tumbling of a crane onto DeepCore, and its pulling of DeepCore to the edge of the abyss, is a suspenseful titbit but perhaps the most impressive scene is completely computerised artifice. The alien water pseudopod that probes the ship is a breathtaking effect from George Lucas's



Industrial Light and Magic. It prompted me to wonder whether Cameron's desire for realism didn't run contrary to the very nature of the realm of magic and artifice that is film.

There are other moments, but they remain just that, titbits. There is no arching plot to generate suspense and interest. The alien stuff is so reminiscent of Spielberg's *Close Encounters* that it's hard to believe that someone, somewhere, didn't say 'Hold on. Now, just wait a minute here. This has been done already, for Christ's sake!'

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

The look of the alien, for all its diaphanous manta-ray quality, is the same goggle-eyed expression of the scrawny alien who waves at Richard Dreyfuss's everyman in *Close Encounters*. There's even a cute baby-ship that whirrs and hovers around the divers, and a big mother ship that rears up and...

But why go on?

While not exactly bereft of ideas, the film weakly recalls another SF epic. Brigman's journey into the heart of the alien domain, with phosphorescent lights reflecting off his helmet, too closely apes the journey made by Bowman at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. But there is no grandeur this time, only goofiness. There's even a scene where a ROV spies on the SEALs from outside DeepCore. One immediately recalls HAL spying on the astronauts, reading their lips. Paying homage is fine... if it's in the framework of its own, somewhat original, story.

The dialogue – when not masked by some of the excellent acting sequences – is dumb. People titter at the wrong times. It's embarrassing to listen to Mastrantonio's character sweet-talking to her husband during his leap into the abyss.

LOST SUB PLOT

It's all a terrible disappointment.

Despite some pulse-pounding moments, lasting ten or fifteen minutes, the film fails

to develop a coherent head of steam. The lost sub-plot was handled completely wrong. We should not have seen the submarine go down, not have seen the first hint of the gee-whizz super-speeding aliens. Then there would have been some mystery, some suspense.

When Cameron introduces the fear of – uh-oh, we're low on oxygen, gang – it should not have been resolved in the next five minutes, as it is when Mastrantonio's character turns on some extra tanks, and meets the friendly aliens close up.

The wild-eyed SEAL is a weak villain. He's nutty, incompetent, and not really evil. After he sent the warhead down to the alien beings, I wondered why those creatures, if they're so damn smart, couldn't disconnect the device.

The marriage jokes, the reference to the estranged characters played by Harris and Mastrantonio, wear thin. The film becomes an odd paen to matrimony and life, even as Cameron and Hurd are in the process of dissolving their own marriage.

Then there's one last thing.

After an impressive display of technical accuracy, with advanced deep diving techniques, and even an incredible use of a liquid oxygen tank for diving to the abyss, DeepCore is brought to the surface with no one suffering the bends. The aliens must have done it, someone comments. But, if they're so ignorant about the nuclear threat, how are they going to know that humans can burst open if subjected to massive pressure change?

How indeed?

I suppose that *The Abyss* is entertaining enough. It's not Cameron's *Heaven Gate*, he's too good a director for that. But it's not enough; not for the cost. And not for the epic scale, the technical achievement that the film represents. It could have been the underwater epic of all time. But it lacks one thing: a story. A skilled writer could have helped the script in dozens of ways. Even a competent hack would have punched up the lame dialogue. Cameron dreamed this skit up when he was a teenager, and it shows.

HORROR HOSTESS TO VISIT BRITAIN BOMBSHELL!

GORY BE!

**'SHOCKING!
OUTRAGEOUS!
SCANDALOUS!' –
Little Old Ladies
Against Everything.**

Elvira, the controversial queen of American horror-dom, pours out her heart to John Gilbert.

If anything can replace the ho-hum image of the pumpkin at Halloween, it is likely to be the shapely figure of Elvira, the host of all those late night movie shows we hear so much about in the UK, but never see.

Once you get past the racy, fast-talking screen image which millions are soon to see when New World releases her first feature film, *Mistress of the Dark*, you'll find Elvira – real name Cassandra Peterson – an interesting, intelligent and chatty being who is not so secretive about her real identity as I had been lead to believe.

'I was an actress in LA and I heard about an audition for a horror movie hostess. I went to the audition because I needed the money.'

'The local station had seen about a thousand people. I went in looking like a normal person but afterwards I was told that I needed to come up with a look that was macabre. A local kid that I knew came up with it.'

Although Cassandra initially entered the race to become the top horror hostess for financial reasons, it was her dream job for other reasons. 'It was the perfect job for me. I've always been a horror movie fan, particularly those old bad films, and I've always been into *The Twilight Zone*. One of my favourite films is *House on Haunted Hill* with Vincent Price.'

SANTA CLAWS

So, would she describe herself as not only a fan but also an ambassador of horror? 'I probably would. I think that, since I came onto the scene, the genre – in particular horror movies – has been given a boost. I've also given Halloween a big boost. The Halloween industry was fairly small to begin with, but may have broadened its appeal to people who didn't watch the films or who weren't normally interested in the genre. Sometimes I feel like Santa Claus. Perhaps they'll soon have

Elvira in department stores asking the kids what they want for Halloween.'

Cassandra is not just busy during the fall witching season. Her schedule for the next three years is a hectic whirl of meets, openings and television shows. 'I haven't had a vacation for seven years. This afternoon I'm going to meetings for my Halloween show which'll take place in an amusement park in LA.'

"I don't mind gore but not gore in the real world. There has to be a small supernatural, nightmare or fantasy element in there somewhere"

Blanket coverage indeed, but Elvira is also about to hit Britain on the small and big screens. Tynesoft have got a computer game coming about about me. It's real horror and there are scary things in it. There are two elements to it, the real world and an underworld. Elvira is in the real world but she has to get to the underworld.'

THE VAMP

In *Mistress of the Dark*, however – which is set for a September release – she tries to do everything possible to get away from anything remotely supernatural. The film is a spooky comedy but includes none of the rough stuff reminiscent of contemporary horror, which is probably one of the reasons why it took her so long to find the venture capital. 'The idea came up a long time ago. We tried to sell the film many times in Hollywood but it was difficult. They said I was not well enough known and that my show did not cover the entire US. It took us six years finally to get the deal.'

Cassandra was no stranger to



the film world and its emmisaries. Several times she was asked to appear in horror movies and in the original *Fright Night*. She turned down an offer to appear as the horror host before Peter Vincent was invented. 'I was asked to be in the project, but I turned it down because it differed from my character. I was also asked to be in that Grace Jones movie, *Vamp*, and *Love at First Bite* but, again, I turned them down.'

THE HUNGER

Despite the family appeal, double entendre jokes and low gross out factor of her eventual movie debut, Cassandra – or Elvira – has nothing against a good dollop of gore. She does, however, draw a very interesting line between what she will or will not accept. 'I don't enjoy the *Friday the 13th* line. I'm not into those movies. To me that's not horror and fantasy. I don't

like reality to come into it. I don't mind gore but not gore in the real world. There has to be a small supernatural, nightmare or fantasy element in there somewhere.'

But most horror films take place in the real world. 'There has to be a small supernatural, nightmare or fantasy element in there somewhere. *The Hunger* is one of my favourite films and I liked *A Nightmare on Elm Street* because there were fantasy elements, it was all about dreaming and set in a fantasy world.'

Her tastes will hopefully prove popular in Britain if a planned satellite television show gets the go ahead. 'I have a feeling in my gut that the British audience will love Elvira's character. They have a greater appreciation and understanding of the humour of the sexual, the double entendres that are in my film. You know, someone once called me the female Benny Hill!'

THE CARPENTER

Starring: Wings Hauser, Lynn Adams, Pierre Lenoir, Barbara-Anne Jones
Director David Wellington
Distributor Parkfield Pictures
Cert 18

After his stint as editor on the disastrous *Zombie Nightmare*, I'm surprised and delighted that a distributor has picked up David Wellington's first major stab at directing.

The well cast Wings Hauser (*Tough Guys Don't Die*) stars as a rugged, undead anti-hero who rights the wrongs done to suburban housewife Lynn Adams and continues to build the dream house on which he was working when he died.

Adams' husband has been having an affair, the men working on her house would each love to nail her to the floor, and her best friend is suspicious of what she's been up to on her own in that house all day.

Enter Hauser as The Carpenter, a man who works at night because his earthly life was cut short by a quick trip to the electric chair. His offence? The mass murder of all those who got in the way of his work.

The deadpan expression on Hauser's face while drilling, chopping and chiselling his victims just has to be seen to be believed. Unfortunately, it is all



there is to look at because the film has been hacked to pieces and the strongest visual effects, such as Hauser rotor-sawing a man's arms off, are missing.

Fortunately, humour saves the film from becoming a total flop. Hauser's one-liners will evoke a groan or two from viewers and his almost comic, though touching,

rapprochement with the housewife who has recently been released from an insane asylum, will prise out a titter or two.

The embarrassingly hammed-up finale, where first hubby and then Hauser get theirs, provides horror at its most uninspiring and points to the major failing of the film. Despite the occasional

humorous set piece, the script does not move and one gets the feeling that the show could have been squeezed into half an hour which is pity, really, because the concept of *The Carpenter* is very innovative.

John Gilbert

THE LAUGHING DEAD

Starring: Tim Sullivan, Somtow Sucharitkul, Wendy Webb, Ed Bryant, Gregory Frost, Patrick Roskowitz
Director Somtow Sucharitkul
Distributor No British distributor
Cert TBA

A crazy script, a bunch of enthusiastic horror/SF writers eager for stardom, and some OTT special effects: what more could

you ask for in a low budget horror movie? Maybe a bigger budget, but this innovative black comedy already throws in everything but kitchen appliances.

There's the priest who is slowly losing his faith, the woman with whom he had an affair so many years ago, her foul-mouthed son who proves to be his (the priest's) also, and the evil Dr Um-Tzec whose plan is to resurrect the ancient Mayan religion of blood sacrifice on a worldwide basis.

All these characters meet when

Father (?) Zeke, the lascivious priest, takes a bunch of ne'er-do-wells and yuppie superconsciousness freaks on an archaeological safari which is to culminate in followers witnessing the ancient Festival of the Dead.

Their bus breaks down, they are stuck in Um-Tzec's domain and all Mayan hell is let loose. Father Zeke is possessed by the spirit of the death god after a rather unusual heart to heart, his bastard son is kidnapped for sacrifice, and the other travellers are variously ripped asunder (see FEAR Issue 8 for the gory details). Before the fairly predictable, and again OTT, climax, we've been party to a game of baseball with a head as the ball, a meeting of gods dressed up as dinosaurs, and a conclave of Zombies who look suspiciously like several revered horror writers and commentators.

The film is, generally, professionally photographed though the comic edge is handled better than the drama. Unfortunately, anyone who tunes in halfway through or has not been prepared for what they are watching may ascribe a certain inane puerility to the proceedings. For me, though, the film was pure entertainment, though nothing like what I expected from scriptwriter Somtow who, under the name S P Somtow, wrote *Vampire Junction*.

John Gilbert

*US Preview

BAD TASTE

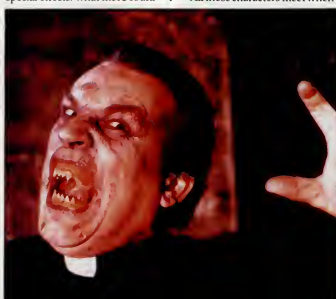
Starring: Peter Jackson, Mike Minett, Pete O'Herne, Terry Potter, Craig Smith, Doug Wren
Director Peter Jackson
Distributor Blue Dolphin
Cert 18

The most talked about horror genre film in a long while; and one can see why! You'll need more than a strong stomach to see this labour of love, which gets its theatrical release this month.

Jackson, who stars as the somewhat loony, though always sincere, Derek, is first encountered after roping a very human-looking alien by one leg from a cliff top. He proceeds to interrogate this visitor from another star system by repeatedly shoving a pick through his foot while giving the gory details to two of his friends who are on their way by car.

Sounds strange? Yes, you may think so. But Derek is in the right and these cannibalistic aliens, led by the repulsive Lord Crumb - who does an uncannily accurate impression of the elderly Oswald Moseley - are planning to ship great quantities of human spare ribs and burgers to their buddies in far-off space ports.

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Derek and his mates stop at nothing to rid the Earth of the inhuman menace. These cannibals get their heads half blasted off, and various other parts of the anatomy severed – that's when they're not enjoying a tasty bowl of human vomit or human-in-apple dip.

All expense may well have been spared in making this movie over a seven-year period but, despite a some frenetic and often jumpy camera work, you're unlikely to get more gore elsewhere on a UK cinema screen than you'll see here. 'Is the BBFC going soft?' you may ask. The answer is probably yes, or perhaps they had their eyes closed when they watched this one.

Moving on: viewers who are in it for more than the gore will be pleased to know that there is an element of raucous humour in *Bad Taste*, all of which, as you would expect, fits the atmosphere of the film. Each alien killing is followed, post haste, by some fairly inventive one-liners, the visual gags never let up and the ending in which . . . no I couldn't spoil it . . . Suffice it to say that it just goes totally overboard and off the planet.

Bad Taste is a film to be watched and savoured – if that's the right word. It's an alien, cannibalistic, epicurean delight for anyone who even suspects that they have a warped mind!
John Gilbert

ELVIRA; MISTRESS OF THE DARK

Starring: Cassandra Peterson
Director James Signorelli
Distributor New World Video
Cert 15, 96 mins

It's about time that living voodoo doll Elvira turned up in Britain, and what better vehicle in which to do it than a movie?

Unfortunately, this film ain't too hot but Cassandra Peterson is, as ever, wonderful as her alter-ego who, after leaving her show hosted from a rundown television station in Los Angeles, under the impression that she's about to star in an Las Vegas spectacular, soon

Unfortunately that's what she becomes when she discovers that the cookery book was used by her aunt to bake up spells. Her great uncle, no mean wizard in his own right, wants the book and is willing to get Elvira branded as a scarlet woman if she won't hand it over.

Fortunately all's well that ends well, which is more than can be said for this film. Don't get me wrong, I think Elvira is a very talented lady who milks every one-line gag in the paltry script for everything it's worth. I do not think this movie is a particularly



finds that she'll have to pay her own fare to the golden town.

Fortunately an old aunt dies, leaving her some property in Fallwell, Massachusetts. What she doesn't realise is that the property comprises an old run down house and a cookery book. The local good ol' boys are willing to do up the house but one gets the immediate impression that the other, more frowny, inhabitants of the town would love to burn Elvira as a witch.

good vehicle for her launch into Britain nor to widen her appeal in the US. Let's have some of the good 'wholesome' fun from the lady's television series rather than the blatant sexism which eats up great chunks of a movie which pokes fun at small town conservatism.

I for one hope that Elvira continues to make movies but I fear it will take a long time for her to live down *Mistress of the Dark*.
Andrew Morentis

PARENTS

Starring: Randy Quaid, Mary Beth Hurt, Sandy Dennis
Director Bob Balaban
Distributor Vestron Video
Cert 18, 81 mins

Bob Balaban's debut movie as a director is another in the recent spate of films that cut through the thin veneer of the all-American way of life to reveal a deranged and black interior. *River's Edge*, *Blue Velvet* and now *Parents* all possess a heart of darkness.

The wholesome Laemle family move to a new home in a new town, the year being 1954. Their son Michael, though, is a very worried and concerned child. His mom (Hurt) and Dad (Quaid) try to be the perfect parents, but they are perhaps just a little too perfect. Michael is also troubled as to why they always have leftovers for tea every night.

He shares his thoughts with the school shrink (Dennis) and to disprove these misgivings she takes him home to prove that everything is really okay. But she ends up finding out why this film has

an 18 certificate!

The film changes tone when the secrets of Mom and Dad are revealed. It becomes oppressive and really scary, staying in step with the magnitude of their

CHUD II: BUD THE CHUD

Starring: Brian Robbins, Bill Calvert, Tricia Lee Fisher, Robert Vaughn, Gerrit Graham
Director David Irving
Distributor Vestron International
Cert 15, 81 mins

Who the heck is Bud? He's certainly not one of the original CHUD crew, an undead army developed by the military to fight the foe without let-up. Then again, this movie is nothing like the original. For starters, Vestron are keen to play up Bud's public image. 'He's hot. He's sexy. He's Dead.'

He also has a hankering for flesh and brains and he initially satisfies this on a family poodle and a lady keep-fit fanatic. But I'm getting ahead of myself, so to speak. Buddy boy begins still life

in a military establishment. He's re-animated by a couple of high school boys who need him to replace the corpse they lost while picking it up for a biology lesson.

Bud, naturally, escapes and dines on some of their town's seedier citizens. The boys are soon caught by the army, in the wacky personage of Robert Vaughn and, given the choice of life, imprisonment or finding the CHUD, they decide to try and bring Bud back in.

Is life ever that easy? No, and by the time this piece of humorous schlock is over, Bud has the last laugh. Although you rarely get to see him during this 80-minute movie, he's the real star, though he seldom says anything but 'Meat'. He's good fun all the way and, if you don't expect anything exceptional, you'll be in for almost one and a half hours of very light entertainment.

Andrew Morentis





undisclosed interest.

Randy Quaid is a treat to watch as Dad, underplaying the normality just enough to reveal the undercurrent of lunacy within the plot. This fits in perfectly with the

extreme normality Balaban creates, within which the characters play.

If you want to see a scary, humorous and threatening film, this one has no higher pedigree. John Glenday

THE CHAIR

Starring: James Coco, Gary McCleery, Paul Benedict, Tina Alvarado, Stephen Geoffreys
Director Waldemar Korzeniewski
Distributor Medusa Pictures
Cert 18

This is the original prison movie, which started production before Irwin Yablum's *Prison*, but was halted halfway through because of lack of money. It also marks the last film performance of famed television actor James Coco.

It is a better movie than *Prison* in every way, apart from its special effects which are wonderful but few and far between. But it suffers, as *The Abyss* is likely to suffer, because it's a 'done subject'. That said, however, the storyline is deeper, more sinister and more humorous than Yablum's best efforts.

Just twenty years ago, the present sadistic prison warden, Dwyer, then just a guard, watched as rioting prisoners trapped and fried his boss, Callaghan, in the electric chair. Now the prison has been turned over to a wacky psychologist who is determined to reform the small batch of inmates with his mind games.

But, as the prison is re-inhabited and the electricity switched on, the old warden's spirit



becomes active and seeks revenge on just about anyone it can find.

Although the effects are sparse, the electric chair operation is grotesque and a sequence in which one of the guards has a meeting with a fan points the way towards what is to come: action, comedy, horror and the odd piece of kitchen-sink drama. If you haven't seen *Prison*, skip it for a week and rent this. I guarantee you'll be glued . . .

John Gilbert



DOLLS

Starring: Stephen Lee, Guy Rolf, Hilary Mason, Ian Patrick Williams, Carol Purdy-Gordon, Cassie Stuart, Bunty Bailey, Carrie Lorraine
Director Stuart Gordon
Distributor Vestron International
Cert 18, 74 mins

Remember the ground-breaking menace of *Re-Animator*? Now take a gander at director Stuart Gordon's latest little masterpiece, *Dolls*.

The difference is, unfortunately, marked. *Re-Animator* was a splendid, gutsy production which went into overdrive, while *Dolls* is little more than a bland, black fairytale.

A couple and their child get caught up in vicious thunderstorm. The car breaks down,

the woman blames her new husband, throws her stepdaughter's teddy away and steps back in amazement as they discover a seemingly-deserted house.

They break in, are discovered by the quaint doll-making couple who live there and settle down for a cosy night. Enter a chubby driver with two young girl hitchhikers and settle down for a night of mayhem as the girls get murdered by the little people, their chubby friend is saved by his love of toys and the little girl has to grow up quickly as her parents are fed to the wooden fauna who are interesting, but not in the least bit frightening.

Dolls is a moralistic tale, too clever for its own good, and yet another case of fat atmosphere, shame about the story. May I suggest you take a look at *Puppetmaster* which should appear on video at the beginning of next year, or forget about this rapidly developing mini-genre altogether?
John Gilbert

ALIEN NATION

Starring: James Caan, Mandy Patinkin, Terence Stamp
Director Graham Baker
Distributor CBS/Fox Video
Cert 18, 90 mins

Nice title, shame about the film. It would be a tempting and cursory dismissal, but a grossly unfair one.

Alien Nation begins with the interesting (if not wholly original) premise that three years ago, 250,000 genetically engineered eggheaded aliens crash-landed in the desert near Los Angeles and since then have been integrated into the city's multicultural society. Some have become police officers, some crooks, others hookers. Various referred to as either 'newcomers' or 'slags', depending on your viewpoint, these refugees from outer space have two hearts, an aversion to sea water and a tendency to get pissed on sour milk.

James Caan plays it tough as Detective Sykes, a hard-drinking bigot, assigned the department's

first alien detective, Sam Francisco (Patinkin) after his long-time partner is gunned down by a newcomer. Together, in search of the killer, they infiltrate the settler community, uncovering instead a drug network set up by alien politician Terence Stamp (wasted under latex) to serve his fellow extra-terrestrial junkies.

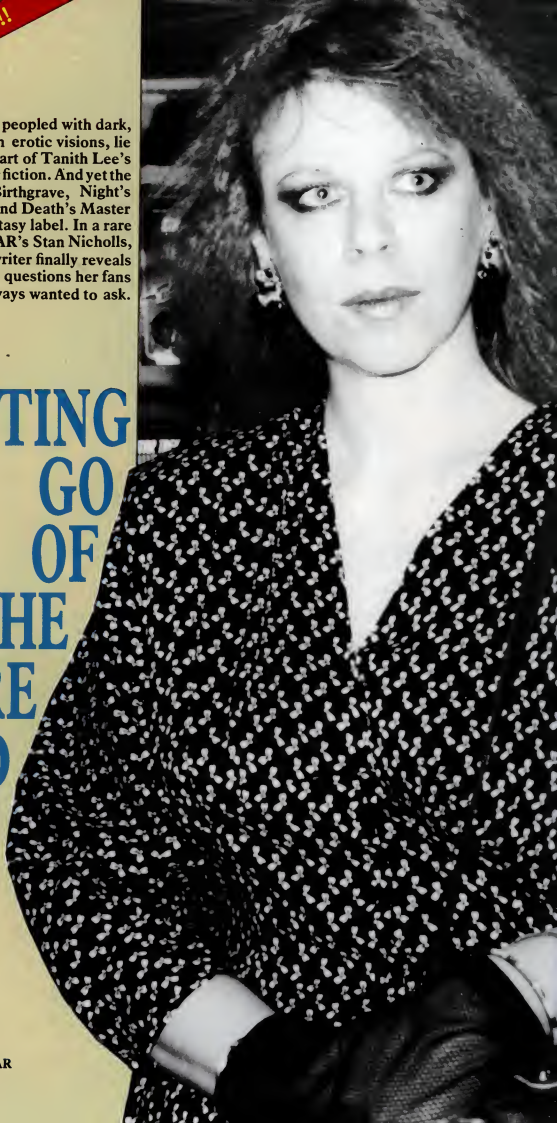
The script, by former *Twilight Zone* story editor Rockne S O'Bannon, offers allegories a-plenty, from the plight of refugees to xenophobia and the morals of drug abuse, throwing in the odd condom joke, too, for good measure. The racist undertones are kept to a minimum as the film switches direction midway, taking up the mismatched cops routine with much success. Thanks to Baker's slick direction and cinematographer Adam Greenberg's sumptuous night-time photography, the film looks exceedingly good, even if the plot runs out of momentum in its latter stages.

Mark Salisbury

FEAR EXCLUSIVE!!

Strange places, peopled with dark, alien and often erotic visions, lie at the heart of Tanith Lee's most popular fiction. And yet the author of *The Birthgrave*, *Night's Sorceries* and *Death's Master* refuses the fantasy label. In a rare interview with FEAR's Stan Nicholls, this fascinating writer finally reveals the answers to questions her fans have always wanted to ask.

LETTING GO OF THE HERE AND NOW



hen did you start to write?

TL: I started when I was nine. In my late teens I wrote a collection of horror stories, and some of them have subsequently been published in their

original form with very little touching up. At around nineteen or twenty I began to write children's books and had lots and lots of rejection slips. As they say, I could have papered my walls with them; and I really needed to, because I was very poor at that time. Then I sent *Birthingrave* to an American publisher, and they took it.

SN: What kind of education did you have?

TL: My parents were professional dancers, so we moved a lot and I was constantly disappearing from one school and turning up at another, which was perhaps not very helpful. School was a bit of an interruption really, because they wanted you to do homework pieces, and that came between me and what I really wanted to do, which was the fantasy projection of my inner world. I managed to pass the eleven-plus by the skin of my teeth, and then went to grammar school which, as far as I was concerned, was marvellous. There was a wonderful English teacher, a wonderful history teacher and a wonderful religious teacher, and they were my heroines, intellectually. They encouraged me to write by being very interested themselves in their subjects and imparted that interest; it was like having a skein of wool passing between you. It was the sort of education you're supposed to have, but which so many people don't ever get.

ONKA PONNA TINNA

SN: Did you read a great deal as a child?

TL: I didn't learn to read until I was nearly eight. I couldn't learn. My classic was, 'Once upon a time . . .', which I used to read as, 'Onka ponna tinna . . .'. Finally my father, who I think had been very concerned for a long time, took me in hand and taught me to read, mostly by using Hans Anderson's *Fairy Tales*. I remember the process being very painful and frightening, and I couldn't make head nor tail of anything. Then there was a sort of blank, and suddenly I could read. From being a child in the class who couldn't read, I became the best reader in the school.

SN: When you did learn, what were your preferences?

TL: I read everything and anything. I know I was reading Shakespeare because my father got me on

to that very quickly. He would tell me the stories of the plays with such obvious, genuine, amazed love that I caught his enthusiasm and was able to read them myself. Apart from that I suppose I was reading the usual children's things; and my mother used to tell me lots of fairy stories, but in her stories the prince married the wicked witch in the end.

SN: Can you tell me something about the way you work?

TL: If the book is coming, and I've got the time, I try to work on it every day. When I started to write professionally I still lived with my parents, so if I wanted to spend three days in bed writing, there wasn't a particular problem.

People would look round the door, raise an eyebrow and say, 'Do you want another cup of coffee, dear?' And dear would say, 'Yes, please, and it would appear. When I got my own house, and took on the responsibilities of being a householder, I found you just don't have as much time. But it's not really routine because it's erratic in its enthusiasm rather than disciplined.

SN: Do you plan your stories in advance?

TL: No. Once or twice I've had an outline in my head, and indeed with the book I'm working on now I was asked to give one, which I did. But I explained that the final book would have nothing whatsoever to do with the outline. They accepted this, and it was as well they did, because it doesn't.

SN: Does that mean you have to rewrite a lot?

TL: If it's coming, it's usually as good as I can get it. Apart from going through the tidying and getting the repetitions out, and making some of the sentences work a bit better purely structurally, the actual piece of prose I've got is there.

The only thing I did three drafts on, consistently all the way through, was a book on the French revolution, which I've yet to place with a publisher. It's enormous, and although I hate the word 'faction', it's the perfect term for this book. But I've been told it's too horrible, too depressing, and even too accurate. I did so many rewrites on it, not because I was feeling insecure or in any way inadequate to the task, but somehow the very fact that my main character was a writer, and a real writer who had lived and had written things, made me feel I owed it to him to get as close to the truth as I could, while giving it my own interpretation.

SN: Do you have to get into a special frame of mind before you can start writing?

TL: It's a matter of sitting down and forcing it to come. Chasing it, courting it and wooing it; *cursing* it when it doesn't comply. Really it's

"My mother used to tell me lots of fairy stories, but in her stories the prince married the wicked witch in the end"

"When it's said someone has to act in character it's so untrue, because nobody ever does. That's the test of a human being"

a case of saying, 'No, I won't have another cup of tea, I won't clean the windows now, I won't play with the cat.' One does put it off for some reason. Even when you've got the inspiration you'll find things to do. I suppose, if I analyse it, it's a case of letting go of the here and now, and getting into the then and there.

ART DECO WIRELESS BOX

SN: How does the creative process begin?

TL: The first thing that comes to me is usually a feeling. It's a feeling which doesn't have a shape, a sound, or a smell. It's literally something passing through the middle of the body and you don't know what it is. It's like a chemical. And then out of that, gradually, other things start to come, and you get the images. Sometimes you get the characters first, sometimes a place. Or even a time of day. The closest I can get is one of those times when you suddenly smell something, like jam or apple blossom, and it touches a memory, but you don't know what that memory is. There's a feeling associated with it that's very nostalgic, and tantalising, and you can't pin it down.

I've done forty books and over a hundred short stories, and some plays and things, and I know instinctively – if not physically now – when I need to rest. I usually find with every big thing I do that there's at least one block, sometimes two, and if taking a break doesn't make it come then you have to hack your way through with a machete. I don't get frightened, because I feel it will come back; it's one of the things I'm really confident of. In fact, it doesn't go away. But sometimes there's enough of an accumulation of input that you can't take it for a little while. It's very strong, like being possessed. Unwillingly possessed. So you may need time to allow yourself to experience real life and to heal yourself. Then you can open out and let yourself be possessed again.

I think most of us are much more receptive than we allow ourselves to be. It's like radio waves. If you're receptive, or let yourself be, you can catch them on your receiver and relay them through your little art deco wireless box. You've picked up something that's just floating around. All of my books are part of a continuing thing, like tiles in a piece of mosaic.

SN: Do you have any idea what the picture will be once that mosaic is finished?

TL: None at all. I think my books must be of a oneness because people find themes in them. I've read analyses of what I've done, and although sometimes it's nonsense – or at least seems to be to me – often I think, 'Oh yes, I can see that now. I couldn't see it when I was writing it, but it's there.' So

other people are going to find out what that picture is, but I probably never will, and I don't care.

SN: Are you saying you've become an instinctive writer, or that you always were instinctive?

TL: The drive is part of the instinct, it's all part of the same package. The journalistic side of it, if you see what I mean, is that you try to get as close to the truth – whatever it is, on that inner screen – as you can. If you remain true to that, yes, you'll make mistakes and you'll misinterpret, but you aren't going to make any lying mistakes. You're not going to sell yourself out, because you can't.

SN: What's a 'lying mistake'?

TL: Lying to yourself more than anything else. Say you're writing a

passage about somebody walking into a room they've never seen before, and you start to describe the room – and you describe it for an effect, because you think those words will look nice together – but it's not what's really in the room. So you look at it, and simply describe what's in the room, and it will find its own pattern, usually.

DEAD OR ALIVE

SN: Do you take your characters from life?

TL: Occasionally – although I don't normally draw from life – you get something from someone you've met that is so strong you want to use it. But there are also hordes of characters who as far as you know aren't based on anyone you've ever



met or seen. It's strange to me, and startling, but it's unconscious retention, perhaps. You get these characters, and you know one of them has got to die, and won't. Or one you want to keep alive insists on dying. Then you have to either bring them back or get around it in some way.

I suppose the characters in my work are so sixth-dimensional to me they seem like people I'm meeting. Then again, I've always thought that people never act in character. When it's said someone has to act in character it's so untrue, because nobody ever does. That's the test of a human being.

SN: Do you do any amount of research?

TL: Usually with fantasy you don't research, but you sometimes have to. For example, I was writing a sword and sorcery novel and wanted to feature a ship, and thought I really had got to do some research. So I read a lot on the subject and then invented a ship which probably wouldn't work, but at least I was inventing it wrong from a premise of knowing what I was talking about. I've never really researched any sort of weaponry – I suppose I'm remembering things I've read and seen. I feel instinctively that I know what to do, and nobody's ever said to me, 'This doesn't work.'

SN: Do you approach a novel in the same way as a short story?

TL: Yes, I think so. Obviously they're different mediums, but for me everything I write is different from everything else anyway. A number of styles use me. Each story has its own style, and that style comes with the beginning of the story, and you let it do what it wants. But the frame of mind I'm in is always the same, as far as I know. There's some part of you in which you have to open a door to let it through. If I'm stuck, it's because for some reason that door has got blocked.

SN: Do you prefer one form over the other?

TL: What I like best is the thing I'm working on. With a novel it's a bit frightening when you first start. I've got a big work there and, although I'm quite fast usually, I know it's going to take a certain amount of time. It's like casting off from shore without a boat. You're a strong swimmer, but you haven't swum for a while, there's no visible landfall. You hope you're going to find the island you think is out there somewhere. It's never let you down before, but there can always be a first time.

SN: Presumably you like reading science fiction and fantasy?

TL: No. I used to read a lot when I was in my very early teens, but now I prefer people like Mary Renault, Laurence Durrell and Penelope Farmer. Obviously, I read some science fiction sometimes. For instance, if there's a new Ray Bradbury, I'll go out and get it. Inside the genre – and I hate

genres, I hate labels – there are some absolute masters, who are wonderful, but there's also an awful lot of stuff which doesn't appeal to me at all. There's so much of it, I'm afraid it tends to send me running in the opposite direction. But that's something I've only analysed recently; as far as I knew, I was just finding a lot more writers to read.

PURITAN ETHIC

SN: What does being a writer mean to you?

TL: It's the only life I could possibly live. I'm not very good at leading a normal life, or being involved in a set of rules like getting up early in the morning and going out to do a very dull job, having an hour to eat and digest, then coming home in the evening to try to fit in what I want to do. I know this is what most people have to do, and to me it's terrifying, and wrong. Dreadfully wrong. I hate the idea that people have to be disciplined, do jobs, and suffer and have rotten lives. It's wicked, and it's part of the puritan ethic; it really should go, but I can't see how it can. I don't have an answer, I have a question: *Why?* When I started to work, I realised very quickly the purely physical disciplines of it were not for me, and I couldn't handle them. When I finally became a writer I was able to work much harder than I ever did when I was working for anybody else. I could live at my own pace. I could eat when I wanted to eat, and not eat when I didn't want to, and sleep when I needed to sleep. And I could run around the house when I needed to run around the house, and not have to worry about getting up terribly early the next morning. All those things came together and it was as though the interim had just been a bad mistake which was best forgotten as quickly as possible.

SN: Why do you like writing fantasy specifically?

TL: I don't.

SN: You don't like it?

TL: I don't really consider I write it. Again you see it's this hatred of labels and ghettos. I just write. To my mind, a good fantasy novel reads like a good historical novel, it just happens to be set on another world, and science fiction is probably closest to contemporary fiction, with a development of what we have now thrown in. It's all about people. That's what I want to write about, and what I care about. I was writing so-called fantasy novels when I didn't know there was such a thing. *The Birthright* I simply wrote. It's very difficult for me to prove this, because my contemporary novels have not been published yet. But they are much more peculiar than my fantasies, much more fantastic. They have exactly the same sort of feel.

SN: Why haven't they been published?

TL: I've had two sorts of reactions:

'You're not writing what you usu-

ally write, so we're not interested,' or, 'We've never heard of you' – which was the response I got to my very first fantasy novel. It's doesn't really deter me, it just annoys me. But the labels are starting to go, and all the ghettos are opening out: you're getting books which are two or three things at once. At least it's causing some confusion and muddle. And everything comes from chaos. This categorisation thing depresses me more for other people than it does for me. When I started I was rejected consistently, and insulted fairly regularly by the form of those rejections.

CHERRY ON THE CAKE

SN: Do you have any conception of your audience?

TL: Not until afterwards, but it still comes as a sort of shock when somebody comes up to me and says, 'I've read your book'. It always startles me, as though they've said, 'I've seen inside your front room'. Of course, it's gratifying to get an enthusiastic response, it's the cherry on the cake. You don't need the cherry on the cake but it's very nice to have it.

SN: To what extent do you write for a market?

TL: I write as far as I want to write in what I'm doing, and if I want to change that, I will change it. For example, I wrote the book on the French revolution. I was fairly sure it would have a cold reception, and it did. But I wanted to write it, I felt I needed to, and I wrote it. It took me two years, with the research and revision. I'll do what I'm driven to do, and I believe the drive will always be there in one form or another. I can't write what people want. I have to write what I want.

SN: So you are fortunate in that what you love to write also sells?

TL: Yes, I've been lucky that it's run parallel to a certain extent, but if it isn't going to, I won't be able to change. I have to do what's coming through me, the thing my receiver is locking on to. And I love it. It's the most exciting thing in the world, when it's coming like that, and there's no option. You literally spend the whole day crouched in a chair, getting cramp in every part of your body, and in your hair and eyebrows. You're just writing, and your hand's falling off. ... It's marvellous! Obviously I'm happier if it does work out, because I need financial security – everyone does – but I don't really have that choice. If I said to myself that I had to write in a certain way in order to make money, I know that would be the finish.

SN: Notwithstanding what you've said about labels, do you see yourself always writing fantasy?

TL: No. But I can't really enlarge on that because again I don't know where that mosaic picture is going. But no, I don't. I expect to go on being a writer, in one form or another.

"I hate the idea that people have to be disciplined, do jobs, and suffer and have rotten lives. It's wicked, and it's part of the puritan ethic; it really should go"



FROM SCRIPT TO SCREEN

The road to live-action superherodom is littered with snagged tights, dented egos and irate comic fans. It is often claimed that a comic is a movie on the printed page, but despite the superficial similarities, comics are not sophisticated storyboards; accordingly, the transition is often unsatisfactory. Brigid Cherry examines the history.

The Dark Knight has survived the hype. Tim Burton's *Batman* hit the screens and showed itself as big, bold, brash and beautiful. Of course, it's pulp esoterica. What else could it be?

This is the comic book character brought to life in a way the pre-special effects serials of the Thirties and Sixties could never have managed. As a movie, it's immaculate, impressive and almost faultless. But it is only, and could only ever be, an impression of the comic book saga.

The economic need to reach as wide an audience as possible means the darker elements that can be present in the comics are excluded. The constraints of a special effects movie mean that the emotional pay-off is pared down. The artifice is just a little too obvious, we can see the special effects for what they are and are expected to marvel at them for their own sake.

For a film, none of this really matters. It's sheer technology,

"Comic heroes have been getting roles in the movies ever since the serials of the Thirties"

fun, escapism. It's the public conception of what *Batman* has always been about. But does the film faithfully reproduce the spirit of the comic?

The question is important because *Batman's* success has given rise to a spate of proposed comic adaptations. Suddenly, comics are safe territory in Hollywood. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is already in the making and *The Return of the Swamp Thing* has already opened in the States. Anything up to fifty or sixty more comic book/strip adaptations, including *Watchmen*, are being mooted. Comic fans, quite rightly, feel cheated by the productions, for they can never quite live up to the books that spawned them.

NO FLASH IN THE PAN

Comic heroes have been getting roles in the movies ever since the serials of the Thirties. In 1936, three years before *Batman* appeared on the scene, *Flash Gordon* escaped the confines of his newspaper strip in a 13-chapter adventure.

Artist Alex Raymond created *Flash Gordon* in 1934 to rival *Buck Rogers*—the first American science fiction comic strip. At the time, Raymond's work was praised for its elegance and style and even today some believe it has never been bettered. The only element of the strip to make it onto celluloid was the storyline. True, *Flash Gordon* is still appealing when it pops up on contemporary television, but it fails to achieve the beauty and penmanship of the original.

Even so, a money-spinning

formula is worth repeating. *Flash Gordon* was followed by *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (1938) and *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (1940). Buck Rogers imitated Flash's cinematic success in 1939, although the comic strip itself was ten years old by then.

Comics and funnies had been around since the 1900s but it wasn't until January 7, 1929 that the first science fiction strip with space ships and rocket pistols appeared. *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* was written by Phillip Francis Nowlan (based on his work *Armageddon*, 2419AD which appeared in *Amazing Stories*) and drawn by Dick Calkins, a staff artist at National Newspapers. The one-page serialised strip was syndicated throughout the United States.

The fact that the film version was made ten years later is a demonstration of its popularity. The *Buck Rogers* artwork was often crude, but the action and style caught the public imagination and it was this that came through strongly in the serialised movie.

SHAZAM!

But *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* have made recent cinema appearances, and so too will their serialised cohort *Dick Tracy*. Hopefully, reprising the success of four serialised versions, which included *Dick Tracy's G-Men*, made in 1939 and *Dick Tracy versus Crime Inc.* (1941) – are Warren Beatty and Madonna. Back in the Forties, however, events were taking a turn.

In December 1936, a magazine entitled *Flash Gordon's Strange Adventure* appeared. It looked, superficially, like a comic book but it was text-based and it prepared the ground for the first issue of *Detective Comics* in January 1937.

During the following few years a host of superhero comic characters were born... and so were their cinematic counterparts. The first comic book (as opposed to strip) character to make the giant leap was Captain Marvel. After Republic's deal for the rights to *Superman* fell through, Fawcett Publications, the owners of *Captain Marvel* and publishers of *Whiz* were quick to step into the breach and provide the superhero material.

The twelve-chapter *Adventures of Captain Marvel* reached the cinemas in 1941 to the famous cry of *Shazam!* (Solomon for wisdom, Hercules for strength, Atlas for stamina, Zeus for power, Achilles for courage and Mercury for speed). Republic, who also made *Dick Tracy*, had serial film making down to an art and they endowed Captain Marvel with as much vigour as his comic

book alter ego.

Batman fared less well in his first screen appearance during 1943. True, it was popular but its success was more due more to unintentional comedy than any deliberately humorous elements. Melodramatic in the extreme, this *Batman* was a foreshadowing of the comic (sic) Sixties television series. (When the latter was at its peak, the Columbia *Batman* was edited down from its fifteen parts and re-released as *An Evening with Batman and Robin* (1966). The follow-up serial, *Batman and Robin* (1949) was even worse. If Bill Finger's and Bob Kane's *Caped Crusader* is unrecognisable in the first serial – in a wrinkled batusuit and flimsy cape – he's an interloper in this tawdry effort.

"Captain America was no longer an American soldier gone AWOL but a district attorney fighting crime in a novel way"

Batman was followed, more successfully, by *Captain America*, the Republic's last comic book-inspired serial. Republic changed the secret identity of Captain America for the duration of the fifteen chapters. He was no longer an American soldier gone AWOL but a District Attorney fighting crime in a novel way. Despite this, the heart of the comic is captured in a patriotic adventure that never lets up. Dick Purcell, as America, gave his all, and died shortly after completing the project.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Superman finally made it to the big screen in 1948, ten years after his first appearance in National Comics' *Action* (1938). It was unfortunate that the rights to Siegal and Schuster's superhero were acquired by quickly producer Sam Katzman who had toted the project around the studios in search of a big budget deal.

Turned down by Republic and Universal, a *Superman* serial was undertaken by Columbia, who had made such a hash of *Batman*. Katzman was offered a 'really effective flying sequence' for \$64 per foot or 'not so effective animation' for \$32 per foot. It's not hard to guess which he chose. *Superman* was a disaster. But again, only in terms of faithfulness to the comics. Such was the popularity with the public, that it became the highest grossing serial of all time.

Two sequels followed, *Atom Man versus Superman* and *The*

Mole Man in 1950 and 1951 respectively, the latter made to promote the upcoming George Reeves television series.

The Fifties saw a lull in comic films. Horror was big news and science fiction was indistinguishable from the shock genre. Comics got darker and attracted unwarranted attention from the guardians of American society. It was the era of EC horror classics, which would emerge in the cinema of the Seventies.

The backlash against comics reached a peak and many companies ceased production. King Comics, publishers of *Flash Gordon*, *Mandrake the Magician*, *Brick Bradford* and *The Phantom*, and The Justice Society of America, whose titles included *Hawkman*, *Flash*, *Green Lantern*, *The Spectre* and *Wonder Woman*, ceased production in the early Fifties, along with Planet Comics and Famous Funnies. The escalation in science fiction became a golden age, and comic cinema was forgotten except for such occasional oddities as *Kotetsu No Kyojin* (1956) – a Japanese variant of *Superman* in nine chapters.

HORROR HERITAGE

It wasn't until 1966 that comic book creations got another chance to make it big in the movies, and then only as an

offshoot of television. The Sixties saw a string of exaggerated fantasy series – *Lost in Space*, *Doctor Who*, *The Avengers*, *Star Trek* and the Gerry Anderson puppet shows – which gave the general public the impression that science fiction was camp. At that time, *Batman* could have been made in no other way. The film encapsulates the television series. There is little telling them apart, apart from length.

The adaptations of *Barbarella* and *Diabolik* had a little more loving care and attention lavished on them in 1967. But then, the Europeans have always shown more concern, though not always reverence, for the artistic merits of their culture. *Barbarella*, from the Jean-Claude Forest strip, has something of the essence of the original but what is more important is that, in cinematic terms, it works. In spite of its abhorrently sexist nature and the camp approach, parts of the film are quite wonderfully surreal.

Mario Bava's adaptation of Angela and Luciana Guisanni's Italian comic *Diabolik* is less well known. Danger: *Diabolik* is almost as sophisticated as the original comic and has the arch-criminal destroying Italy's tax records before meeting his death in a way that out-





Goldfinger's *Goldfinger*, *Diabolik* is one of the better comic adaptations, possible because it has a hero who is also the villain which means that the narrative has to be less sanitised. Also, having one of Italy's renowned horror directors at the helm helps.

The horror heritage is prevalent, too, in the EC horror comic adaptations *Tales From the Crypt* (1972) and *Vault of Horror* (1973). Amicus were well experienced in the omnibus style of filmmaking and in these two memorable productions adapted the controversial work of Al Feldstein and William Gaines. Often atmospheric and shocking, the mood of the films reflects the moralities that got the comics banned in the Fifties. *Crypt* and *Vault* gave a taste of how good comic book adaptations could be if they were allowed to reflect the horror inherent in many comics.

INCREDIBLE HYPE

Unfortunately, the economics of a film industry beginning to exploit the new technologies of special effects meant more effort was being put into producing family and audience-pulling films than being faithful to the comics on which they were based. Worse still, most of the comic films of this time were, like *Batman*, primarily television series teasers or offshoots.

Stan Lee, Marvel supremo, had a vision of a string of productions based on Marvel characters being made into film pilots for television programmes. *Spiderman* got things off to a dismal start in 1977 in a lifeless EW Swackhamer movie. Like the previous productions of *Bat-*

man, *Spiderman* was stripped of all those comic book moments that hinted at Peter Parker's schizophrenic/neurotic nature. Likewise, *The Incredible Hulk* (1978) seemed less manic and disturbed than his comic book relation.

The *Spiderman* television series went on to spawn a second, and equally dull, movie, *Spiderman Strikes Back* (1978), but it was the popularity of *The Incredible Hulk* that ended the proposed sequence of Marvel adaptations. It was simply decided that all effort should go into continuing the profitable *Hulk* television series.

"Often atmospheric and shocking, the mood of the films reflects the moralities that got the comics banned in the Fifties"

These films were being put into production at a time when the blockbuster special effects vehicles of the late Seventies were beginning to emerge. Neither *Spiderman* nor *Hulk* tried too hard in these stakes, but *Superman - The Movie* (1978) was at the forefront of the genre. 'You'll believe a man can fly' screamed the hype, and this was the essence of the film. Not that you'd believe that a mild-mannered newspaper reporter could be the last of an alien race endowed with superhuman powers, but rather that an actor could be given the power of flight courtesy of the special effects department. Though a far better made film than the

1948 version, this *Superman* is still left wanting in the comic book stakes. This is partly due to the necessity of having to divest itself of the comic legend; the second part, released in 1980, is a much better evocation of the spirit of *Superman* in the medium of film. The two further sequels were merely cashing in on the success of the first.

A NEW BREED OF HERO?

The Eighties saw a rather disparate collection of comic adaptations. Perhaps the most ambitious was the 1981 animated version of the French comic *Metal Hurlant*. Divided into eight segments, each animated by different artists, and overlaid with a heavy rock score, *Heavy Metal* became too fragmented for its own good. Obviously, some sequences were better executed than others, but overall it didn't live up to expectations.

Nor, for many fans, did *Howard the Duck*, appallingly renamed *Howard*... A *New Breed of Hero* for its UK release in 1986 with a title card tacked onto the film before the distributor's logo! Suffering somewhat from being associated with George Lucas and even more for being made safe enough to gain a U certificate, *Howard* bombed before it was even released. Still, the story is better than is generally accepted and, in places, it touches on the outrageous/surrealism of Steve Gerber's creation.

If these attempts make it seem virtually impossible to transfer raw comic to the cinema screen, *Swamp Thing* (1982) proves the point. Trying too hard to capture the comic book feel with

screen wipes and undulating cross fades, Wes Craven neglects the narrative and mishandles the action. The film degenerates into a manic chase back and forth across the bayous, and this *Swamp Thing*, in a baggy rubber suit, is unlike anything seen in the Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson comic books.

Stephen King and George Romero produced a homage to the EC horror comics with *Creepshow* (1982) and *Creepshow 2* (1987), but the material belonged very much to the written word of King. Both films interspersed comic frames and animated sequences as the frames moved into live action and these are very much the better moments of both *Creepshows*. It was when comic film moved into the realm of pastiche that it succeeded best. *The Return of Captain Invincible* was made in Australia (1982), but was not released until 1985. Aimed mainly as a satire on American life, it spoofed a medium that had been monopolised by the United States. In so doing, it came closer to the comic book than many other straight adaptations have done.

SPEARHEAD

Meanwhile, out in the real world, the comic book had grown up. The graphic novels and prestige comic editions (often marked 'For mature readers') have garnered an adult audience leaving the children, often seen as the prime readership, with flimsy comics and even flimsier films (*Master of the Universe: Care Bears*) mainly designed to market toys. The likes of Alan Moore (see *FEAR* Issue 3), Bryan Talbot and Frank Miller have spearheaded a revival and comics are now more respectable than they have ever been.

Amongst the many comic titles currently under option are *Captain America* (UK release next year from Castle Pictures), *V for Vendetta*, *Green Lantern*, *Sgt. Rock*, *Brenda Starr*, *The Punisher* (New World, next year), *Rogue Trooper*, *Nob Hunter* and *Judge Dredd*. Not all of them will become films and many will have the benefit of care such as that lavished on the latest *Batman* movie.

Film has performed many a disservice to the comics realm, but comics have often been a great source of ideas for the movie world. Moebius has both inspired and worked with Ridley Scott, Enki Bilal has recently turned to filmmaking, and *Robocop* owes more than a passing debt to *Judge Dredd*. Whether through inspiration or adaptation, comics cannot fail to have a continuing influence on the cinema.

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CHRISTOPHER FOWLER is the author of *Roofworld* and of a collection of short stories, *Bureau of Lost Souls*, which is published this month. He is also a codirector of The Creative Partnership, a company which specialises in making film trailers. TCP is responsible for the trailers promoting *Alien*, *The Last Emperor* and *The Living Daylights*.

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BROUGHT TO BOOK

Introducing our spanking new books column where we'll be surveying the sights and sounds of the world of publishing. Let no editor, author or marketing manager be spared. This month critic and editor David V Barrett samples some serious SF humour.

Somebody was complaining to me recently that there's not enough humorous SF and fantasy. I'm delighted to be able to start off a new column by refuting this statement. Let's kick off with the latest Discworld book from Terry Pratchett, *Pyramids* (Gollancz, hardback, £11.95).

We all know that you can't read a Pratchett with other people around; either they kill you for giggling uncontrollably without telling them why, or they dismember you for reading out loud the bits they want to read for themselves. What you're reading is bound to be funnier than what they're reading, so they'll get you for that if nothing else.

Okay, so what's *Pyramids* about? Well, mummies that come back to life hoping their stitching holds together, gods that people believe in (well, sort of) but never expect to put in a personal appearance, a camel called You Bastard, a teenage pharaoh who's trained to be an assassin but doesn't like killing people, and nubile young serving wenches wanting to peel your grapes...

I wish I'd discovered *The Evolution Man* by Roy Lewis (Corgi, paperback, £3.99) years ago. First published in 1960, this

is one of the most unusual humorous books I've ever come across. It follows a Stone Age family as they discover fire, cooked meat, better ways of hunting, art, music and dance. And all the time they're discussing how they're evolving into homo sapiens, using words and concepts that won't be invented for another thousand years. This is very, very readable intelligent humour, incredibly funny.

Another one which starts off in the Stone Age, this time with two young alien students messing about with human evolution (and creating heaven and hell, where most of the book is set) is Park Godwin's *Waiting For The Galactic Bus* (Bantam, paperback, £2.99). It's hilarious and, like most humour, it's cruel and vicious in places, but that's because it has a lot to say about how people behave. That's what humour's all about, revealing the dark side of life so we can cope with it. In this case it's racism and fundamentalist Christianity, which both get thoroughly lambasted.

Land of Dreams (Grafton, paperback, £3.50), by James Baylock, is a different kind of humour: quiet, restrained, old-fashioned American. It's a bit like Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon Days* with teenage characters and an added dose of strange. I suppose it's fantasy, though bits of it are disturbing

horror. And, underneath it all – the weird, the magical, the scary – is this really warm, neighbourly humour.

Good old-fashioned adventure SF now: Bob Shaw's *The Wooden Spaceships* (Orbit, paperback, £3.50), sequel to *The Ragged Astronauts*. The planets Land and Overland orbit around each other and share the same atmosphere. To defend themselves against invasion from Land, the Overlanders send a task force to the halfway point between the two planets, getting there by hot air balloon. I love the scenes where his characters bomb around on jet-propelled one-man fliers, like motorbikes in space. Crazy and almost unbelievable.

Another good sequel: Colin

Greenland's *Other Voices* (Unwin, paperback, £3.99) is set in the same world as *The Hour of the Thin Ox*. This time he leaves the jungle war behind to take us up into a mountain country where Princess Nette's country is occupied by the orange-skinned Escalans. This is a quiet, thoughtful fantasy, with love and treachery, bravery and death, in Greenland's strange, mediaeval-Chinese setting.

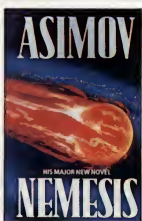
And a really kooky one to finish off. Ken Webster's *The Vertical Plane* (Grafton, paperback, £3.99) purports to be a true account of a sixteenth century guy communicating with a Cheshire schoolteacher through his BBC microcomputer. I have my doubts.

NEMESIS

Isaac Asimov
Publisher Doubleday UK
Format HB, £12.95
Category Science fiction

Isaac Asimov appears to have taken a liking to series books in the recent past, as witnessed by *Foundation* and *Robot*, but his latest novel appears to be – so far – a one-off which is not connected with either of the above series.

It begins as Marlene, a fifteen-year-old girl, begins to have her doubts about the space colony in which she's living, the nearby red dwarf and the ultimate fate of planet Earth. She soon realises that the red dwarf, code-named Nemesis after the goddess of retribution, is on course towards Earth's solar system and will upset the magnetic balance of the planets, causing huge catastrophes on that home world. The event may take several thousand years to occur but as her mother, the scientist who discovered Nemesis, points out, it's unlikely that all human life can



be lifted from Earth in time to prevent the death of civilisation.

Asimov's book is yet another astonishing deep space story, similar to *Foundation* in its focus on careful characterisation rather than hard tech, but so different in that it concentrates on small colonies rather than huge galactic empires. My only criticism is the way in which the story jumps around in time and space, sometimes making it difficult to follow the thread and understand

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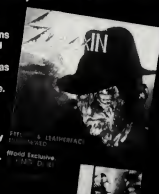
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Issue 17 is out now, & includes a seasonal look at the Halloween movies, interviews with Ray Harryhausen, Wings The Carpenter-Hauser, & Martin Apartment Zero Donovan. Also a guide to Horror comics & competitions to win copies of, among others, The Carpenter & The Chair.

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the characters. As a result, the book matches many of Asimov's other 424 or more accomplishments. But, for my money, it does not touch the wonderfully told tales of *Foundation* that have earned him many fans during the past decade.

John Gilbert

BEASTS

I have never seen a werewolf novel quite like this one from Stephen R George (*Zebra*, paperback, £2.95). It could be described as 'War of the Wolves' in which Michael Smith, a man trying to live down a lycanthropic blood disease, is chased through small town America by his ex-lover.

Smith has decided to settle, but Sondra starts to kill off the locals. Smith decides to take a stand, even if it means giving in to his rapidly growing wild nature and, perhaps, killing those whom he has learned to love.

The book is a rare find amongst some of Zebra's lesser titles and George is obviously going places. Its proposal of a rare blood disease which, in turn, makes the victim crave for the red, coppery stuff is highly probable and the introduction of strong characters makes the climax even more dramatic. This is an author to watch, and a book to buy.

John Gilbert

STILL LIFE

Sheri S Tepper
Publisher Corgi
Format PB, £2.99
Category Horror

Several months ago Sheri Tepper, a wonderful lady from deepest America, told me that she did not enjoy the horror genre. It is too depressing, and her books are full of life and hope – there's no arguing with that.

The problem is, however, that she can write very effective horror which, at times, beats even the so-



called masters. *Still Life* is yet another example of this craft, following on from *Barb Bones* and *Blood Heritage*, though it does not continue that sequence.

Our heroine is Sarah Chenoweth who becomes suspicious of a woman working as art tutor to her next-door neighbour's wife. The woman, called Madeline, soon moves into her employer's house and, soon after, the accidental deaths start to occur. Sarah discovers a sinister plot in motion when she finds an ancient painting that predicts the next death. To counter this systematic murder she must learn to use magic, not an easy task in a disbelieving world, even for a woman with Hopi Indian ancestry.

The book is really a dark fantasy in the romantic tradition, but includes enough death and destruction to be classed with the better examples of contemporary horror. I can't decide whether I prefer Sheri Tepper's fantasy, SF or horror. One thing I am sure of, though, is that she should continue in all those genres.

John Gilbert

TAROT TALES

The unusual premise of this short story collection is that a number of well known authors used the Tarot card deck in order to produce a series of fascinating fantasy tales (*Legend*, Paperback, £5.95).

Editors Rachel Pollack and Caitlin Matthews set only one proviso for story creation. The writers must use a deck to create their fiction. Some choose particular cards which set off their imagination, while others simply used myths already associated with the Tarot as a starting point.

The contributors include Gwyneth Jones, with a mischievous story of mythic love, M John Harrison, with a trip through the deck's major arcana, Storm Constantine, whose story explores another side to the public face of occultism, and Michael Moorcock who adds to our knowledge of the cards of wisdom with a more or

less contemporary tale about the creation of a card. Of those mentioned Moorcock's was the one I most enjoyed – if that's the right word – but the standard of the collection is uniformly high.

Some people may be put off the book because of its use of a so called 'damned deck', indeed the Tarot has been called the Devil's Picturebook, but I fail to see why an instrument which has obviously created such wonderful stories should be condemned out of hand.

Buy the book and see what you think.
John Gilbert

THE KING IN YELLOW

R W Chambers
Publisher Dedalus
Format PB, £4.95
Category Horror/fantasy

The King in Yellow is a classic, if you didn't already know, a series of interconnected short stories commented upon by many generations of horror writers, including the dread duo, Lovecraft and Derleth. It has also recently been included in *The Top 100 Horror Novels*, a list put together by Stephen Jones and Kim Newman.

So, what exactly is all the fuss about. Well, these short stories are connected by fears generated by a dread book, similar in concept to Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*. Whilst it never completely treads Lovecraft's boards – although Chambers had a great interest in insanity – its stories provide bitter social comment in a way that only the great French short story writers, such as de Maupassant, could do.

It is a book for readers who like the chills to come like slow thunder and who don't mind the compact, and complex, first

R-W CHAMBERS

The King in Yellow



person narrative.

The King in Yellow has dated, it would be useless to deny it, but, despite its being older than the Cthulhu mythos, it stands up better to contemporary scrutiny than Lovecraft's work, which is stylistically inferior in many respects. At first glance it appears to be an odd choice for republication, but I guarantee that it will soon have you lost in its rich agelessness.

John Gilbert

BEST OF MODERN HORROR

We appear to have hit the age of the horror anthology, as *Prime Evil* and now *Best of Modern Horror* (Viking, hardback, £14.95) crowd the shelves.

Edited by Edward L Ferman and Ann Jordan, the latter turns out to be a major disappointment as far as new material is concerned (stories range from 1951 to 1987), but the standard of said material is uniformly high. Top of the tree, we have Charles Beaumont's *Free Dirt*, the tale of the well-named Mr Aorta who has a peculiarly dark fetish for the word *Free*; Richard Matheson's *Dress of White Silk*, a short but spunkily chilling story of childhood; Lisa Tuttle's atmospheric *Bug House*, which has more than a sting in its tale; and Charles L Grant's *Pride*,



small town horror set in the author's Oxrun Station.

Other brand name writers include the ubiquitous Stephen King, the delicious Lucius

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Shepherd, the coldly calculating Robert Aickman, the puckish Ian Watson, and our own Stephen Gallagher. This is an anthology for all seasons, climates and readers, well written and almost completely avoiding the gorier side of the genre. But be warned; beasts may lurk here, though they be fairly aged.

Mark Westerby



HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: A CHRONOLOGY

Science fiction has always postulated the theoretically possible in alternate universes of the future, but Peter Lorie and Sidd Murray-Clark have come up with an interesting batch of 'future' theories in their latest non-fiction book (Pyramid, hardback, £12.95).

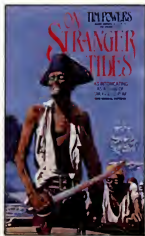
It begins in the year 2000 and inspects human life and environment right up to the year 3000 in a series of charts, photographs and illuminating textual chapters.

Taking a look at life in the not-so-distant future, we find a discussion of science versus religion and how both can be unified, new ways in which illness might be treated, changes in political and financial infrastructures, and a move towards a more compassionate study of mysticism.

The book shows that human beings will become more physically powerful and mentally agile, willing to study doctrines that would not be given a second thought by today's scientists. Dreams may literally be brought into our conscious life, and that life experience can be widened through illusion. Even sex can be used to move into higher consciousness modes.

Messrs Lorie and Murray-Clark provide an invigorating view of a human future in which we are too busy with our own development to worry about destruction. Invention follows invention, breakthrough follows breakthrough, but I doubt that the real picture will be so rosy. The *History of the Future* provides the flip side of the progressional coin, where we might harness our genius rather than do away with the ozone layer or destroy the rain forests. It tempts the reader to look inward at what could come from their very thoughts. It is the method of Einstein, the doctrine of creativity, and I, for one, hope that these two authors are right.

John Gilbert



ON STRANGER TIDES

Pirates, black magic and plenty of swashbuckling sound like the ideal ingredients for a superb fantasy adventure, and Tim Powers is just the sort of witch doctor to beguile you into believing the weirdest imaginings. This exotic tale (Grafton, paperback, £3.99) takes up just under 400 pages with a well-woven plot which is never predictable.

The story is set in 1718; John Chandagnac is a young book-keeper and puppeteer enjoying a long voyage during which he becomes enamoured of Beth Hurwood, a damsel soon to be in distress. Her father is a widower obsessed with resurrecting his wife, whatever the ghastly cost. Soon enough their ship runs afoul of pirates who John falls in with, taking the name Jack Shandy.

Where Chandagnac/Shandy's loyalties really lie is one of the interesting questions which helps make him and most of the other characters interesting as people, rather than mere ciphers in a spectacular tale. And by spectacular I mean just that, two-headed dogs, re-animated skeletons, pirate ships crewed by zombies and held together with magic all make an appearance. This is the sort of glorious, big-screen entertainment Hollywood could never afford to make, and it comes complete with a sharp-edge of horror and plenty of intriguing historical detail. After you've read this, make sure you read Powers' earlier classic, *The Anubis Gates*. Stuart Wynne

MEMORIES OF THE SPACE AGE

The recent passing into history of the Voyager space probe has no doubt conjured latent images of those heady first days of space flight in the minds of SF fans.

J Ballard's *Memories of the Space Age* (Arkham House, hardback, \$16.95) reminisces this golden age of the Sixties but also describes the pressures, dangers and startling possibilities inherent in that first great quest for the stars – or at least the nearer planets and satellites of our solar system.

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The book, which is a collection of stories originally published between 1962 and 1985, is written in the style of classic science fiction – no cyberpunk here – and presages the stresses through which all astronauts, and those left on earth regarding the junk still left in the skies, appear to go.

My favourite has to be *The Cage of Sand*, set against a background of a deserted world which is reminiscent of the many other deserted planets in our galaxy but firmly entrenched on Earth near Cape Canaveral. The reason for my delight over this story is not necessarily the art with which Ballard propounds his story – that is unquestionable where this writer is concerned – but more because this SF story still stands up so well twenty-seven years after it was written.

Much science fiction ages badly but, like H G Wells and Jules Verne before him, Ballard is more interested in the human psyche in relation to the environment rather than just the hard cold steel of space flight or machines.

This book is also excellently illustrated with the photo-mosaic artwork of J K Potter. The combination of Ballard and Potter is rare and exciting. I can only hope that they will work together again, perhaps on one of Ballard's less SF-orientated works – one wonders what he would make of *Empire of the Sun*.
Mark Westerby



LEX LUTHOR: THE UNAUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY

Lex Luthor is a mighty bad guy, as any followers of *Superman* will know. In *Lex Luthor: The Unauthorised Biography*, a one-off prestige format graphic novel from DC, we are presented with the unpurged facts. How, at school, he hired hoodlums to beat up his fellow pupils. How, at home, he hated his parents so much he took out insurance and killed them. How he bought off officials with a share of the insurance money. And that's only by the age of thirteen.

Obviously, Luthor is clear – he is a pillar of society and a philan-

thropist. No one can pin anything on him, and when Pete Sands, sometime great reporter and full time drunk, tries to it can only end in tears.

With destitution beckoning, a severe lack of work, the electricity about to be cut off and his ex-wife's alimony unpaid, he grabs at straws. Serendipity leads him into selecting Luthor as the subject for a new, and unauthorised, biography. It doesn't take Sands long to start digging up the dirt, and it doesn't take long for word to reach Luthor.

James D Hudnall – a relative newcomer to the comics scene who debuted in 1986 with *Esper* – writes the words, and Uruguayan artist, Eduardo Barreto, whose previous credits include *Superman* and *Ten Titans*, illustrates. Colour is provided by Adam Kubert. The cover displays a striking and sinister portrait of the 'most nefarious criminal mind to ever touch the DC universe' by Eric Peterson.

The Unauthorised Biography is told as a story within a story. Luthor, relaxing by his fireside, watches a police video tape within which Clark Kent is being interrogated for the murder of Pete Sands; Sands' investigations unfold in flashback. Additional flashbacks, drawn in sepia tones, relate past events as told by Sands' interviewees. It's complicated but well written and, as events escalate into a web of intrigue, finely executed.

Naturally, Kent has been framed – that isn't giving any games away – but, at the end of the day, Luthor is unbowed having won a minor victory. *The Unauthorised Biography* is a good story, intriguingly told with some crafty twists and a sting in the tail.
Brigid Cherry

DRUID'S BLOOD

This fantasy novel (Headline, paperback, £3.50) by Ester M Friesner is something of an oddity in which alternate reality mixes with Victorian Britain. Victoria is a powerful magician whose rule is under threat when her grimoire, the Rules Britannia, is stolen.

The good queen is something of a nympho and one of the objects

of her desire, Dr John H Weston, also happens to be the consort of the famous sleuth Sher... no, sorry... Brihric Donne. The unlikely duo get through a never-ending supply of famous 'contemporary' characters before meeting what could be their Waterloo on the Mound of the Baskervilles.

Friesner appears to have a great deal of fun with the conventions of fantasy, and such obvious enjoyment is infectious. Take the image of the queen from the movie *First Men on the Moon*, add the manic atmosphere of Peter Sellers' Fu Manchu and you'll have the feel of *Druid's Blood* – or a fit of the giggles.
John Gilbert

THE BLACK COMPANY

The first in a series of high fantasies by Glen Cook, *The Black Company* (Tor Books, paperback, \$3.95) describes the latter history of a band of mercenaries who, like their contemporary human equivalents, will do anything for money, even if it is evil.

They are proud to be amongst the last great companies of warriors but, if Croaker, the storyteller, is right their doom is sealed and the break-up of this last great company is guaranteed. What they need is a reason to stay together, in life and death, and a prophecy that assures the rise of goodness within a land which has been dogged by darkness.

Cook combines elements of high fantasy reminiscent of, though not equal to, Stephen Donaldson's work with the dark horror of Tanith Lee – though again he is certainly nother equal.

The book is the first in *The Black Company Trilogy*. A second, called *The Silver Spike*, is also available from Tor, priced at \$3.95.
Bob Rachin

WINTER WOLVES

Earle Westcott
Publisher New English Library
Category Horror

A subtle tale of terror set in Stephen King's backyard of Maine where winter and wolves are the most unsettling aspects of daily life.

The wolves in this novel, however, appear to be phantoms, bent on the pointless murder and mutilation of innocent townsfolk. But, as Westcott reveals the story behind the early settlement of the state by human beings and the annual culls of wolves to protect livestock, it soon becomes apparent that these phantoms want more than occasional innocent blood. They are out to destroy a specific line of men and women, descendants of those who killed their ancestors, in

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EARLE WESCOTT

WINTER WOLVES

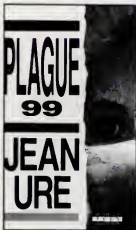


much the same way that the Indians were purged from the land.

Winter Wolves, for all its grisly detail, shows an area of horror fiction which has rarely been exploited: that it is not just human beings who are capable of retribution. The book is skillfully written and quick paced. It contains everything that a horror novel should – chills, action and adventure – but is more than just a straight work of the genre. It should appeal to a more general readership in much the same way as another NEL writer, Stephen Gallagher.

Oh, and by the way, don't bother wondering if this is yet another Stephen King pen name. I'm assured that it is not and, anyway, the style isn't consistent with that of the other Maine resident.

John Gilbert



PLAGUE 99

There is nothing quite so disturbing, or downright terrifying, as a plague, especially when it is highly contagious, it's in London, and will spread around Great Britain as easily as electricity.

Jean Ure's latest novel, *Plague 99* (Methuen, hardback, £7.95) poses such a scenario. It is meant for teen consumption but does not avoid the tough questions of morality and exhibits images of social collapse. It is about three teenagers – which makes it all the

more poignant – who have to change their widely differing life patterns and learn to support each other. Harriet is used to experiencing life to the full but there is no fun to be had in the deserted and increasingly grubby streets of London. Fran is a fragile creature, too kind and gentle to survive alone, while Shahid, the final member of the shakey triumvirate, is used to taking orders from his culture and, more importantly, his father. None are prepared for the social violence that follows in which the only constant is death.

Jean Ure is an extraordinarily gifted writer. You have to be to convey such subject matter to a relatively young audience and with the degree of sensitivity and compassion which she manages to evoke. It is not, however, a childish book, despite its appearance in the Methuen Ten Collection and I would recommend you read this dark drama if only for its sheer artifice in both plot and characterisation.

Mark Westerbey



THE FACELESS TAROT

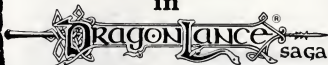
Overt occultism and fantasy have never proved a very edible mix for me, as the symbols tend to get in the way of the story, but *The Faceless Tarot*, by Keith Seddon and Jocelyn Almond, is an unusual and encouraging find.

Its structure is loosely based around a pattern of Tarot cards starting, some would say, strangely with Death and almost ending with Judgement. All becomes plain if you know about the Tarot and that the Death card means rebirth or regeneration which is what this book is about.

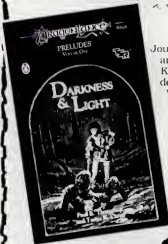
The central character, Eliseus Sebedeus, is a man whose life is influenced by card readings given, apparently, by characters – or archetypes – from the Tarot deck. It is a quest for love perhaps, a telling of what would have happened if, in occult terms (which span the upper and under worlds), one of the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* had survived. But it is also an examination of the path of the Tarot and the quest for illumination which must ultimately pass beyond death, the spiritual abyss, to a new understanding of existence.

The authors handle the themes very well, weaving in dark tales of alchemy, necromancy and mind control to enliven the philosophical dialogue. It is a book for readers who are willing to think on the

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PRELUDES



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symbolism as well as the story. That symbolism does not get in the way of plot but some readers in search of a more usual diet of horror or fantasy may find this work tough going, not an enjoyable diversion. You have been warned, but I suggest you go out and taste this unusual brand of dark, almost medieval, fantasy immediately.

Mark Westerby

TOADY

Mark Morris
Publisher Plakus
Format HB, £12.95
Category Horror

A first novel that shows promise; it's a rare event and Mark Morris is about to get a great deal of publicity from his publisher. He's already been compared with Clive Barker and, suddenly, everyone has this young man's name on their tongues. Is the fervour justified? Well, let's see.

The Toady of the title is a pathetic school boy, ripe for bullying, who has a wicked and overactive imagination. He joins a group called The Monster Club, who meet in the playground, or other depressing locations, and discuss monsters, real and imaginary. They've never taken part in a séance or visited a real haunted house but, at Toady's behest, they do both and on the same night.

A visitation occurs which is similar in spirit to the opening passages of Ramsey Campbell's *The Nemesis*, but only one of the gang admits to the shocking presence. The others remain silent, but sure that they experienced something, and Toady gains a new imaginary (?) friend who can become anyone or anything and who makes its human pal participate in some pretty deadly games.

Mysterious visitors, sudden death and visits to an imaginary world similar to that in King and Straub's *The Talisman*, pop out of Morris's hat with alarming frequency. That said, however, this first novel has a certain immaturity about it. The story shunts along rather than flows, the characterisation is a little loose and bland, dialogue is stilted and the book itself is too long. And yet there is no reason why Mark Morris should not better his initial promise and become a very fine novelist indeed.

John Gilbert

THE BOOK OF AZRAEL

I have never read anything like it. Sub-titled *An Intimate Encounter With the Angel of Death*, Leilah Wendell's non-fiction book (Westgate Press, paperback, \$8.95) is a vision of the darkest fantasy made real.

It's a love tryst – if I dare use



such a definition – between a human being and the dark angel, a communication across the astral plane, a seductive story which, certainly while you are reading it, leaves you with little doubt that it is all the macabre truth. Wendell's idea of love, however, might not be what you would recognise. The melancholic images evoked are at once passionate (in both major senses of the word) and frightening, because that passion is uncontrolled. There is a sense that there might be something here over which the channeller does not have ultimate control.

Read it as fact or fiction – depending on your disposition – but I would recommend that you at least dip into this unsettling book.

Bob Rachin

LITTLE HEROEES

Rock has often been described as the SF's music and in Norman Spinrad's latest hard-tech SF blockbuster, (Grafton, paperback, £6.99), old horny has more than a hand in the havoc.

I say 'hard-tech', because machinery is more important in this future than the human spirit – which has also often been regarded as the font of music. Here we have Muzik Inc which is a forward-thrusting but soul-less company that markets sound like fast food. The people at Muzik Inc have never had it bad but they are worried by the failure of their latest innovation, robotic rockers called APs.

Fortunately, a famous human rock grannie, Glorianna O'Toole, is at hand and has hopes of creating a successful AP – a bit like a bigger version of Bruce Springsteen really. Her price? A supply of the latest designer drug. As you can probably tell, she's a bit of a hippy at heart.

Spinrad casts an unusual aspect of evil in this melting pot where humanity has no importance over music and technology. There are no overt villains in the book, just people influenced by mechanistic, inhuman powers. *Little Heroes* is both a warning of what may be to come and condemnation of the present, a worthy piece of science fiction and social comment which will also be of interest to fans of all fantasy genres.

John Gilbert

CARNIVAL

Another release from American horror publisher Zebra, *Carnival*, by William W Johnstone (Zebra, paperback, £2.95), combines a Bradburyesque carnival, as it visits a small American town, with the wearily familiar bloodlust of a group of carries. The town is deluged with the dead, its Mayor has a major, if unusual, problem on his hands, and his daughter and wife are his only allies. Johnstone's novel is well written and densely populated but it tends towards the easy cliché, especially when compared with the magnificent likes of books like Bradbury's *Something Wicked*, *Twilight Eyes* from Dean R Koontz, and films such as *Freaks*.

That said, however, though *Carnival* may not be a grand stage for horror, it contains a neatly paced, if not wholly enthusiastic, story.

Mark Westerby

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NIGHT

Essays On

Most books concerning the politics and techniques of fantasy writing usually take the genre, strip it of all author individuality, and lay down fairly sterile theories about creating universes, writing out ideas and getting form onto paper.

Ursula K LeGuin, however, uses interestingly diverse and personal essays regarding the genre in her book, *The Language of the Night* (The Women's Press, paperback, £5.95). She takes aspects of her quite considerable works as a prose writer and poet and links them with a wide variety of genre topics. LeGuin has, for instance, a decidedly logical sense of SF world creation – cosmology, not generation. Rather than talk about the weird and wonderful things you can invent and the creatures you can construct, she shows the value of mundane reference books on geography, ethnology and sociology when creating the bizarre. Her message appears to be: try at least to be realistic with your inventions.

The same is true in her discourse about characters within fiction. She quickly introduces Mrs Brown and then asks whether we are too wrapped up in the hulls of our spaceships to create ordinary, dependable characters with whom our readers can identify.

A vast spectrum of analysis, criticism and instruction unfolds in 106 pages, and is followed by the introductions from some of her novels including *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Planet of Exiles*. The book is then capped with discourses on more diverse themes such as sexuality, writing and the future of SF. It's all here, it's all personal, and it's all more interestingly recounted than in a hundred how-to-books.

John Gilbert

THE SUITING

The winner of the best first novel category at the recent Bram Stoker Awards, *The Suiting*, by Kelley Wilde (Tor, paperback, \$3.95), tells the tawdry tale of Victor Frankl, a man who finds a beautiful Blake Tobey suit in a transport locker and decides to wear it.

Big mistake. The suit belonged to a dead gangster and begins to transform Frankl from an eccentric weakling with pebble-thick glasses into a musclebound potential murderer. He begins to take on the personality of the thug, wangles promotion at work by wearing the current manager back onto alcohol, and is intent on revenge against the gangster's murderer.

At the start of the novel, Frankl is unsure as to why he should have the destructive impulses that the suit sends out. You might suspect a happy ending where he shrugs off the evil and overcomes the suit's domination. Not so. Wilde shows that, although Frankl has become a meaty giant with an enormous – though stifled – sex drive, he is still a weed and in thrall to the dead gangster's disembodied, destructive ego.

The book may prove a little disappointing to those readers who expected overt horror à la John Farris but, I suspect, Wilde will not be rushed by anyone – unlike his anti-hero – and, unless this is a one off success, he is in line to become one of the most adventurous horror writers on either side of the Atlantic.

John Gilbert



THE CORPSE HAD A FAMILIAR FACE

No, not a cosy detective story, but a bullet-riddled investigation into the Miami crime scene by crime writer Edna Buchanan (Pan, paperback, £3.99).

Pulitzer Prize winner Buchanan has been a reporter on events concerning unnatural death, rape, kidnap and drugs for more than seventeen years. It's a job for which, as the book proves, she has an ferocious appetite. Forget the danger, she's there, and she's a bullet-hard type of woman who isn't afraid to pass judgement on what she has seen.

The book is rare to the extent that it does not categorise criminals and police as them and us. A steadily rising interest in real crime stories, the police and the whole question of escalating crime is likely to make this a popular book if its natural style and rapid telling of unsavoury truth does not.

Mark Westerby

NIGHT'S DARK AGENT



Lawyer by day, writer by night, anthologist Douglas E Winter is also one of the most renowned horror critics. His controversial short fiction has been nominated for awards, his fabulous collaborative novel with Charles L Grant will undoubtedly see print soon and *Prime Evil*, his first brand-name horror anthology, sees paperback publication in October. As *FEAR*'s Philip Nutman soon found out, this is a man with big things to say.

In the first part of our interview with critic and author Douglas E Winter, (*FEAR* Issue 5), we discussed his critical criteria and examined his feelings concerning recent developments in the genre, specifically the trend he terms 'anti-horror'.

But who is this mild-mannered American whose sharply focussed observations have elevated the level of the dialogue that surrounds the field and its practitioners? It's a valid question, and one that has several answers.

Of Winter, Clive Barker has said: 'His criticism and perspective on the genre have undoubtedly helped shape our perceptions of horror. His viewpoint is one the field has long needed.' Of his passion for the unsavoury and less thought-provoking aspects of popular culture, humorous fantasy writer Craig Shaw Gardner, author of *A Malady of Magicks*, has noted, 'he has the most incredible knowledge of obscure zombie movie music, more than anyone I know.'

On one level, there is Winter the Serious Critic, and on the other, there is Doug Winter, Wrestling Fan and Italian Zombie Aficionado. That's not to say intelligent literary criticism and a passion for cheesy Roman zombie gut-crunch flicks are mutually exclusive, but these two subjects highlight the apparent paradox of one of the genre's most interesting figures.

When his name is mentioned in print it is usually prefaced with the line 'lawyer by day, writer by night'. It's an accurate

description as far as it goes, as he works for one of the US's top legal firms, based at their Washington DC offices, and looks the part. This in itself is not exceptional, but it's the transformation that takes place when he leaves his office that frequently confounds people.

Once he steps through the door of the spacious house in Alexandria, Virginia which he shares with his wife, Lynne, and their two sons, the sober-suited vision of a successful professional man is replaced by that of Winter the Pop Culture Carnivore. He dons his favourite pair of faded jeans, a T-shirt – usually black – of questionable taste, singing the praises of some little-known weirdo rock band, and cranks up the volume of his CD system as he writes at his word processor.

The musical accompaniment is likely to be the strange Gothic Spaghetti Western strains of *The Fields of the Nephilim*, the mutated rhythms of Canadian art terrorists Skinny Puppy, or maybe the lush soundscapes of gloom merchants Clan of Xymox. Yet, if no writing is scheduled, Winter hunches over the keyboards of his technologically intimidating sample desk, composing soundtracks for imaginary Italian horror movies.

But if he needs to relax, he will be found in front of a television set, beer in hand, as he immerses himself in the sweaty grunts and groans of professional wrestling.

'I don't see the dichotomy between the two sides of my life as contradictory,' he opines with an amused smile. 'I've always loved low budget movies, have watched wrestl-

ing since I was a child, and always read horror fiction. You have to remember, I was a writer and a musician before I became a lawyer, so that part of my life has always been there.'

OPEN WINDOW

PN: The world around us is the horror, not the external threat.
DEW: Exactly. Clive Barker's work is a prime example, and I first used the term when reviewing *The Books of Blood* for *The Washington Post*. A lot of his fiction deals with liberation, of placing images before you in a manner that is intended to liberate you from the normal perception of what the fiction is doing. Barker is capable of presenting imagery that's at once horrible yet beautiful. He is saying 'This is a window inside you, a window to the world around you.'

Anti-horror doesn't attempt to impose a closed world, to attempt reintegration; does not return the reader to the world they started out in or reassure them that the world they are in can be returned to normal, to conformity. It is a fiction that's saying 'let's change all the rules' and consequently there is a more open-ended result. It's not the intrusion that's the horror, it is what has existed before the intrusion, what may well exist afterwards. It is our lives that make the horror.

PN: Who else is writing in this manner?
DEW: Peter Straub, for one. *Koko* is a monument to anti-horror. Many of the stories in *Prime Evil*. M John Harrison's *The Great God Pan* is a good example, though the best one is definitely Jack Cady's *By Reason of Darkness*. If the reader does not recognise in the final lines of the story it is a story about the acceptance of darkness and rejection of the bright white lights of the world, then they've missed the point entirely.

PN: So what we're talking about is fiction where the intrusion of the irrational can become a process of redemption rather than a threat.
DEW: Right. We are the threat. That's the bottom line of the best fiction, be it horror or whatever you want to call it, the fiction that really touches our emotions. Fiction that turns back on us like a dark and imperfect mirror.

I used the term in relation to *The Books of Blood* because that seemed precisely to be the perspective Clive was adopting. The intrusion of chaos was not mounted in his stories as a straw man the reader would see put

back in its place. Instead, chaos was brought on to show its possibilities.

ASPECTS OF HORROR

PN: What about *Splatter*: A *Cautionary Tale*, your short story that was nominated for a World Fantasy Award? That seems to me to qualify as an example of anti-horror.

DEW: To emphasise my point, good fiction of this kind is not just about characters who transform, it transforms the readers, who see something about themselves they didn't before. That was my intention with *Splatter*, to attempt to step back from the conventional horror story both in terms of structure and theme, writing a story about horror that at the same time was a road map of anti-horror.

PN: What about *Prime Evil*? That struck me as attempting to explore other aspects of the genre.

DEW: You're right. Although I was delighted when one critic described it as 'the first post-modern horror collection'. The stories are more often than not self-conscious, not in an arty sense, although there's certainly a level of art in the book, but in the sense of writers who have been identified with horror writing not just about horror but about horror fiction itself. Stephen King's story *The Night Flyer* is self-conscious to the point whereby he identifies himself in his own story. There are several other stories in the book which intentionally play off other classic horror tales, from Mike Harrison's *The Great God Pan*, David Morrell's *Orange is for Anguish*, *Blue for Insanity* which is an interesting bookend to H.P. Lovecraft's *The Colour Out of Space*, to Jack Cady's which clearly draws on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. And several other tales are either about writers or writing.

THE BAPTIST

PN: If you define 'horror' fiction as any kind of fiction that probes the dark side, then other writers working in other genres are surely exploring similar themes.

DEW: Hard-boiled author Jim Thompson certainly did; that's what his fiction is about and it immediately springs to mind.

I don't, however, want to suggest anti-horror is anything new, that it is the 'new wave' but it is more important now due to the tremendous volume of traditional horror fiction out there. That concerns me and dismays me. Some of the most



popular fiction of our time is nothing more than an almost stodge recreation of other popular horror fiction. Anti-horror is breathing new life into an area that's becoming less exciting than it should. Splatterpunk, for example, is oddly conservative, not in terms of graphic sex and violence but in its message – order can and will be restored – though in this case via more violent means than before.

PN: Although your own fiction comprises a small body of work at this point, it's clear through the diversity of styles and subjects that you've employed and dealt with that you're not interested in just one area. *Masques*, for example, is clearly a Stephen King type tale, on one hand, and *Splatter* displays the influence of J.G. Ballard on your ideas.

DEW: You're right on both counts. With my fiction I want to try something different each time. I try to approach each story, each novel, from a fresh perspective. Though my career as an attorney revolves around defining things, labelling things, I actually find definition abhorrent, terribly limiting.

I don't get to write fiction very often so, when your output is only two stories a year, I simply enjoy sitting down with the desire to take a fresh approach to the story, not just towards the subject but also to the form; the notion of structure has always interested me, as has pastiche. That's very much present in *Masques*. I'd just finished writing *The Art of Darkness* when I penned that story. It was consciously designed as a King pastiche.

PN: How much do you feel your Southern Baptist upbringing has influenced your approach to fiction?

DEW: My mother encouraged my interest in literature at an early age, while my maternal grandfather had a definite effect on my understanding of storytelling. He was quite a teller of tales. He was the sort of man who would invent a wonderful fable to explain something terrible that happened. When one of our kittens died he explained how a hawk had flown down and plucked it away, as if that to a child was more soothing than the fact a kitten had died of distemper. His tales presented me with the notion that stories could have another meaning. But overall, my religious upbringing did give me a wider view of storytelling.

The Southern Baptist view is extremely conservative, extremely sin oriented and extremely apocalyptic, drawing a picture of the world as full of damnation and redemption, the biblical stories presenting a fan-

tastic and at times incredibly violent world. I clearly recall the hymns asking we be washed as white as snow, and the constant imagery of blood that seemed as omnipresent in that religion as in a Catholic one.

REVELATIONS

PN: There is an apocalyptic element to anti-horror on an interpersonal level, with characters achieving some form of redemption through their transformation or destruction. Those themes are present in the Southern Baptist view of life, aren't they?

DEW: Yes. Very much so.

PN: And, from what I understand, they are also present in *From Parts Unknown*, the novel you recently wrote with Charles L. Grant.

DEW: *From Parts Unknown* is the world's first wrestling horror novel [laughs] and is a retelling of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a bus ride down the New Jersey turnpike. It asks the question: what if Joseph Conrad were alive today, was a professional wrestling fan and decided to merge *The Heart of Darkness* with *The Book of Revelation*? It's a multiple viewpoint narrative that follows a character called Jake Carpenter from the heights of professional wrestling on to the circus sideshow composed of wrestling oddities sent down the highway to Hell, in this case the New Jersey turnpike.

The concept of the book is a realistic fantasy novel. The typical works in that area – *The Talisman*, *The Stand*, Stephen Donaldson's *Thomas Covenant* books – involve sending people from the real world over into another which parallels our own, and they move across that landscape experiencing fantastic things. We wanted to apply the imagery of fantasy to the real world and, in essence, *From Parts Unknown* is a realistic novel. In the typical Tolkien-esque story, you have a multi-racial band of adventurers – elves, dwarves, giants – and in professional wrestling all those exist. Most wrestlers are larger than life, but there are also true giants. All that exists in our real world. Instead of fantastical forests we have the turnpike, instead of the 'magical castle' we have a shopping mall where the throne room of the ancient and much-revered king is an Elvis Presley museum. And the symbols of power our characters use are not magic rings or swords, they are Budweiser beer and other items of blue collar life.

Douglas E Winter is one of the panel of judges in the Prime Evil FEAR competition. See this issue for details or visit any good book store for a copy.

PRIME EVIL SHORT STORY COMPETITION

TO CELEBRATE the paperback launch of *Prime Evil*, one of this year's most impressive horror anthologies, **FEAR** and the publishers **Corgi** have joined forces for a unique competition – to find the storytelling talent for the 1990s.

THE PRIZES

Each of the three winners will receive a superb signed limited edition copy of *Prime Evil*, the anthology that brings together the most revered names in horror fiction, including: Stephen King, Clive Barker, Peter Straub, Thomas Tessier, David Morrell, Jack Cady, Dennis Etchison, M. John Harrison, Whitley Strieber, Thomas Ligotti, Paul Hazel, Charles L. Grant and Ramsey Campbell.

The *Prime Evil* limited edition is printed on thick, acid-free paper, bound in leather and stored in a presentation case. Each story is illustrated in full colour by Thomas Canty. Each book is worth several hundred dollars. There are only 250 copies in existence and each has been signed by all of the authors!

ANY QUESTIONS?

Where can I enter?

Simple. The entry form is below. Just fill it in, staple it to your entry and send it to the address supplied. Alternatively, each copy of *Prime Evil* contains information about the competition and most bookshops have promotional leaflets. We are also holding an official launch of the competition on Friday, October 8 at the British Fantasy Convention. We hope you can attend.

What sort of stories are you looking for?

Anything, as long as it's horror and gives the panel of judges a chill. We suggest you take a read of *Prime Evil*, but there's no reason why you shouldn't be as outrageous as you wish. Just remember that, if selected, your story will be published next year in *FEAR*. From subtle supernatural horror to the wildest of Splatterpunk... We don't mind: the choice is yours.

How should I submit my manuscript?

All entries should be under 1,500 words, typed with double line spacing on single sided A4 paper. We can only consider one entry per person. Make sure that you have a copy of your entry as we will be unable to return your submissions. The competition is open to any individual other than employees of Transworld Publishers Ltd or Newfield, or their relatives.

When is the deadline?

No stories should be submitted after 31 December 1989 and no correspondence can be entered into regarding individual submissions.

THE PANEL OF JUDGES

Douglas E Winter. Editor of *Prime Evil*. Douglas has also published several works of non-fiction including *Faces of Fear* and a Stephen King biography. He has also just completed work on a novel with Charles L. Grant.

Colin Murray. Senior Editor of Corgi Books.

John Gilbert. Managing Editor of *FEAR*.

THE JUDGES' DECISION IS FINAL and will be announced in the news pages of *FEAR* early next year.

PRIME EVIL COMPETITION

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THE BREED: SOURCE OF THE SOUL

Star Wars concept artist Ralph McQuarrie has leapt on board the good ship *Nightbreed* to bring the mammoth monster movie some new monsters, a host of imaginative mattes and an expansion of the mythology. Clive Barker talks to this living legend, while John Gilbert listens in.

Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* moves in yet another ground-breaking direction with the addition of award-winning artist Ralph

McQuarrie to the already talented production team.

McQuarrie, who originally claimed his film fame with the spectacular concept drawings for the *Star Wars* trilogy, has been brought in to produce mattes for the Necropolis scenes, and new creature designs and a large mural for the film's top secret opening sequence.

To date, his work has mainly involved sleek, straight-lined, high-tech machines but in

"It's important for me to feel that each thing I put up there is done in a certain spirit"

Nightbreed that style is replaced by often baroque curves. Barker asks whether, on *Nightbreed*, McQuarrie misses the straight line.

"No, not at all. I was apprehensive. I thought, 'What have I got to contribute to this, because that's not me? But, as I get into it, my feelings are that I'm getting closer to being the *Nightbreed* artist. I am about to become the *Nightbreed* artist. The set is completed, the wall is available to work on for this mural and I'm beginning to feel very interested in it.'

Barker then explains, in detail, what the artist is about to accomplish.

'Ralph has designed the his-

tory of the Breed in symbolic form, painted on an enormous mural. So he's not just the artist, he's actually now the chronicler of the Breed's history, springing as they do from the same seed as we humans - the humans being the people who like the Sun and the Breed being the people who rather prefer the Moon. Ralph is now laying out the whole history; the back story, the wars ...'

SCORPIONS, MOSTLY

The mural spans a sixty-foot space at Pinewood but, as McQuarrie admits, it's not such a huge area once you think about the material that has got to be included. 'It's a lot of space, but part of it is taken up with other things that need to be there ...'

'Scorpions, mostly,' Barker quips ...

'... You might say we're going to get the atmosphere or the spirit of it.'

McQuarrie feels it is important to grasp a film's background mythology while working and the world of *Nightbreed* is already a canvas to which he can add his own.

'At least it's important for me to feel that each thing I put up there is done in a certain spirit. The mural is a chronicle, a kind of catalogue of these creatures and these normals who are in the process of becoming the Breed.'

Although this mythology is important to the artist, McQuarrie was pulled into the movie at such short notice that he did not have the time to read *Cabal* for more source material. He does not, however, regard the minor omission as a problem.

'The film has become the

thing, and the film was pretty well done when I got here. I saw the film just a week or so ago and I loved it. I thought it was fabulous. It was almost like a finished film. It works as it is -

"The mural is a chronicle, a kind of catalogue of these creatures and these normals who are in the process of becoming the Breed"

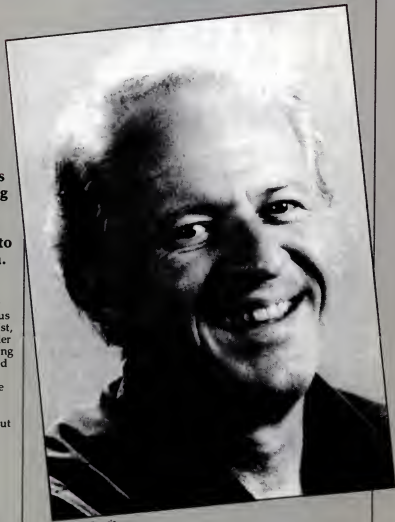
with the exception of the bits that have to be matte painted. It works very well.'

Barker has the final word about what McQuarrie's art will bring to the film as a well packaged product, rather than a creative form. 'Fox saw the picture at the weekend and what they talked about was the mythology. They see it as a very, very dark *Star Wars*, and what Joe Roth, who's heading

up Fox said was that they wanted to put out a trailer which was basically *The Myth* trailer. Put out a long trailer, introduce the mural chamber, use stuff from the picture to present the fact that this movie was going to take the audience - if you think of *Star Wars* as being a trip into space - this is a trip into the earth to meet the dead stuff and the almost dead stuff, and the stuff which wishes it could be dead but can't quite be dead; the Breed, in other words.

'I think what Ralph has been able to lend to the project is a sense of that mythology,' says Barker.

Nightbreed has just completed filming at Pinewood Studios. It will be released in the States in February and in the UK a few months later.



Ralph McQuarrie





PRO-FILES

MURDER MOST FOUL

You only have to look in your high street video store to discover that, from Freddy and Jason to Michael Myers, tales of multiple murder are sure fire crowd pullers. But what happens when fantasy trips into real life? Where do film and video producers draw the line? And how can distributors hope to 'market' representations of human tragedy sensitively, when their eyes are on the box-office and rental returns?

A new video out this month, *The Case of the Hillside Stranglers*, prompts just such questions. In a disturbing interview with Bob Grogan – the hard-boiled, ex Los Angeles Police Department detective who investigated the original case – John Gilbert discovers that, in reliving such horrific factual events, the line between social responsibility and morbid fascination is a very fine one.

Fictional mass murderers on film and television are often given unusual or exotic traits to grab the viewer's interest. They may use incredibly vicious methods of dispatch, they may boast terrible disfigurements but, according to LAPD detective, Bob Grogan, though real life killers may have no conscience, they're more than likely to look as normal as you or me.

Grogan recently visited Britain to promote the Castle Pictures' movie adaptation of his most notorious investigation, *The Case of the Hillside Stranglers*. The film is based on a true life series of ten brutal rape/murders which took place in California during five months between 1977 and 1978. Local businessman Angelo Buono and his younger cousin Kenneth Bianchi posed as policemen and kidnapped women in order to torture and rape them, before dumping their bodies on ground known as Hillside in the downtown area of Los Angeles. This case was one of the most

traumatic for Grogan and the Police Department, not least because of the public anxiety and political pressure from his bosses.

'There was a tremendous amount of pressure, because the city was in a period of frantic fear for a long period of time, mainly because of the exhibition of the nude bodies on the Hillside. The news media were on it every day. Television every

"The news media were on it every day. Television every night. And it was constant"

night. And it was constant. It did create a lot of pressure for the detectives who worked on the case, but that kind of pressure comes from above. The brass react to media pressure, the detective doesn't care, he does his job. Then what happens, shit blows down hill and the brass say let's do this, the tail starts to wag the dog and that kind of stuff.'

Grogan did not discover the killers' use of a police badge until the sixth murder, at which

point public anxiety turned to total panic.

'We had to make a decision whether we wanted to release that information to the public, because we're talking about physical evidence. But we felt we had to release that information, which also puts the policemen who are doing the everyday job in a very uncomfortable position. We had to do that, and when we did it we increased the fear, and the media had a field day.'

COURTROOM DRAMA

The movie – according to Grogan – is a fine piece of work, and introduces a great deal of material in a short time slot. There are, however, aspects of the case which the detective feels could have been played up.

'I would have liked to have seen more time spent on the relationship between Bianchi and Buono, because that's a very unusual serial murder relationship. Mostly you're talking about one guy. How did two guys get to this point? What makes them tick and how to they develop the confidence necessary for them to keep on murdering, and the trust that it takes to do that? That was a love-hate relationship between the two of them.'

The other, slightly telescoped, aspect of the case within the movie was the court issue. 'We spent very little time in court. That thing was all fudged together. The hearings were all separate, but for time and drama's sake they were collectively bunched together.'

It is unusual for a judge to deny a motion by the prosecution to have the defendants released on grounds of insufficient evidence, but the unusual was the essence of this case. 'Usually, when that motion is made by the prosecution, the issue is over because very seldom does a judge oppose the wishes of the prosecution. In this case, the judge had a giant pair of gonads and looked at the evidence and said that no, there was probably cause to continue here.'

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi were convicted of murder but given life imprisonment rather than the death penalty, which was not then operating in California. Does Grogan feel bitter about the outcome.

'I would have liked to see both of them gassed, but what we had to do was give Bianchi a deal to testify against Buono. I had to look at it objectively and be realistic about it.'

'You know, in their case,

spending the rest of their years in isolation is pretty good punishment. I certainly believe in the death penalty, but I don't worry about that. That's the way the system worked at the time. I wish it was the other way but . . . at least we did Ted Bundy, though that doesn't make me feel better.'

Neither killer confessed why they committed the murders and Grogan is not sure if he would have believed them if they had told the 'whole' story.

'Bianchi initially spilled his guts, but you've gotta remember that, being a sociopath, Bianchi's incapable of doing that. He has no conscience, so he's incapable of telling you how he felt, because he didn't feel. Killing those girls was like you and me having a

"I would have liked to see both of them gassed but . . . I had to look at it objectively and be realistic about it"

cup of tea. So, for him to tell you that he felt remorse or why he did that . . . he's incapable of doing that, he doesn't give a shit.'

Grogan saw both men as extremely dangerous but, in his estimation, the man most culpable for the crimes was Angelo Buono. 'The evil guy, who thought of the most games and the most methods of torture, was Buono. He got his kicks with the dark side of the mind. Buono had just enough control over Bianchi to call the shots.'

With hindsight, would the pair ever have become killers if they had not met and developed a close relationship? 'I think Bianchi was on his way to do that. Some of his relationships were extremely strange as a youngster, bordered on physical violence as the way to end a relationship. I think he had the potential to do that. But I think the nucleus of both of them when they got together was the formula that kicked it off, both of them with no regard for human life or property. You put two of those guys together and think you've got a double problem.'

Bob Grogan retired from the LAPD last year and now pursues a career as a private inquiry agent. One of his more famous partners was Joseph Wambaugh, the police procedural novelist. The bug for a writing career has infected Grogan who has co-authored a book about the Hillside Stranglers and already written one film script which he hopes to see into production.

FEAR

FEAR FICTION

As a headliner in this month's selection of FEAR fiction we are proud to be able to offer a taste of Stephen King's brand new book, *The Dark Half*.

King's novel concerns Thad Beaumont, a Pulitzer Prize winning author who has developed a lucrative thriller-writing alter ego named George Stark. After a while, Stark stops being fun, so Beaumont decides to 'kill' him off. But George Stark doesn't want to die. And

a series of grisly murders lead the police to suspect Beaumont and Beaumont to suspect Stark . . .

The extract we have chosen is the prologue to the novel. This describes Thad's peculiar childhood illness and sets the scene against which the violent drama unfolds.

As well as the King extract, we include six more new stories from authors who have submitted their work to FEAR. We hope you like them.

If you have a tale to tell, and if it fits FEAR's horror, science fiction or fantasy brief, then send it to David Western, Fiction Editor, FEAR, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Please remember to indicate the wordage of your story (which must be typed, preferably double spaced) and ensure that you enclose a day-time phone number and a photograph of yourself.

Readers whose stories are being considered for publication will receive notification of this in writing. This notification is not a guarantee that your story will be published and, as we can only feature six or seven new stories per issue, it may be some time before those eventually selected appear in print. So please, please keep those phone calls to a minimum! Of course, if you need your story back urgently, you can contact us on the usual number.

We are obliged to remind new writers that FEAR does not look kindly upon works of plagiarism. So, if you haven't got anything new to say, don't bother to rip off someone else. Sit back instead and enjoy another fantasy-packed edition of fabulous FEAR fiction.



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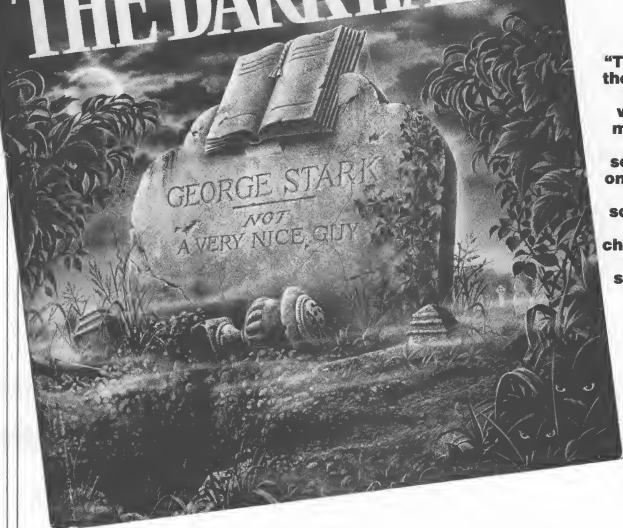
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FEAR BOOK EXTRACT

STEPHEN KING THE DARK HALF



"The onset of these terrible headaches was usually marked by a phantom sound which only he could hear — It sounded like the distant cheeping of a thousand small birds"

Photo: Tabitha King



STEPHEN KING is currently the world's best-selling author, whose many novels include *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Salem's Lot*, *It*, *Pet Semetary* and *)))* (The Tommyknockers)))! He lives in Maine with his wife and two sons. *The Dark Half*, © 1989 Stephen King, is published in the UK on 19 October by Hodder and Stoughton, £12.95 hard-back.

a technicality. He wouldn't be eleven forever.

The second important thing to happen to him in 1960 began in August. That was when he began to have headaches. They weren't bad at first, but by the time school let in again in early September, the mild, lurking pains in his temples and behind his forehead had progressed to sick and monstrous marathons of agony. He could do nothing when these headaches held him in their grip but lie in his darkened room, waiting to die. Eventually, he wished he *would* die. And by the middle of October, the pain had progressed to the point where he began to fear he would not.

The onset of these terrible headaches was usually marked by a phantom sound which only he could hear — it sounded like the distant cheeping of a thousand small birds.

His mother took him to see Dr Seward.

Dr Seward peeked into his eyes with an ophthalmoscope and shook his head. Then he instructed Thad to look at a white space of wall in the examination room. Using a flashlight, he flicked a bright circle of light on and off rapidly while Thad looked at it.

'Does that make you feel funny, son?'

Thad shook his head.

'You don't feel woozy? Like you might faint?'

Thad shook his head again.

'Do you smell anything? Like rotten fruit or burning rags?'

'No.'

'What about your birds? Did you hear them while you were looking at the flashing light?'

'No,' Thad said, mystified.

'It's nerves,' his father said later, when Thad had been dismissed to the outer waiting room. 'The goddam kid's a bundle of nerves.'

'I think it's migraine,' Dr Seward told them. 'Unusual in one so young, but not unheard-of. And he seems very... intense.'

'He is,' Shayla Beaumont said, not without some approval.

'Well, there may be a cure some day. For now, I'm afraid he'll just have to suffer through them.'

'Yeah, and us with him,' Glen Beaumont said.

But it was not nerves, and it was not migraine, and it was not over.

Two days before Hallowe'en, Shayla heard one of the kids with whom her son waited for the school bus each morning begin to scream loudly. She looked out the kitchen window and saw her son lying in the driveway, convulsing, choking on his own tongue. His lunchbox lay beside him, its freight of fruit and sandwiches spilled onto the driveway's hot-top surface. She ran out, shooed the other children away, and then just stood over him helplessly, afraid to touch him. She could only scream.

If the big yellow bus with Mr Reed at the wheel had pulled up any later, Thad might have died right there at the foot of the driveway. But Mr Reed had been a medic in Korea. He was able to get the boy's head back and open an airway before Thad could choke to death. He was taken to Bergenfield County Hospital by ambulance and a doctor named Hugh Pritchard just happened to be in the E.R., drinking coffee and swapping golf-lies with a friend, when the boy was wheeled in. And Hugh Pritchard also just happened to be the best neurologist in the State of New Jersey.

"Pritchard was looking into the window which had been carved in Thad Beaumont's skull with rapt attention"

Deople's lives — their real lives, as opposed to their simple physical existence — began at different times. The real life of Thad Beaumont, a quiet young boy who was born and raised in Bergenfield, New Jersey, began in 1960. Two things happened to him that year. The first shaped his life; the second almost ended it. That was the year Thad Beaumont was eleven.

In January, he submitted a short story to a writing contest sponsored by *American Teen* magazine. In June, he received a letter from the magazine's editors telling him that he had been awarded an Honorable Mention in the contest's First Fiction category. The letter went on to say that the judges had tentatively agreed to award him Second Prize before re-examining application... and discovering that he was still two years away from becoming a bona fide 'American Teen'. Still, the editors said, his story, 'Outside Marty's House', was an extraordinarily mature work, and he was to be congratulated.

Two weeks later, a Certificate of Merit arrived from *American Teen*. It came registered mail, insured. The certificate had his name on it in letters so convolutedly Old English that he could barely read them, and a gold seal at the bottom, embossed with the *American Teen* logo — the silhouettes of a new-cut boy and a pony-tailed girl jitterbugging.

His mother swept Thad, a quiet, earnest boy who could never seem to hold onto things and often tripped over his own large feet, into her arms and smothered him with kisses.

His father was unimpressed.

'If it was so goddam good, why didn't they give him some money?' he grunted from the depths of his easy-chair.

'Glen —'
'Never mind. Maybe Ernest Hemingway there could run me in a beer when you get done mauling him.'

His mother said no more... but she had the original letter and the certificate which followed it framed, paying for the job out of her pin-money, and hung it in his room, over the bed. When relatives or other visitors came, she took them in to see it. This embarrassed Thad, but he loved his mother far too much to say so. Thad, she told her company, was going to be a great writer some day. She had always felt he was destined for greatness, and here was the first proof. He would have won second prize in that contest if not for a stupid technicality.

Embarrassed or not, Thad decided his mother was at least partly right. He didn't know if he had in him to be a great writer or not, but he was going to be some kind of a writer no matter what. Why not? He was good at it. And they wouldn't always be able to withhold the money from him on

Pritchard ordered the X-rays and read them. He showed them to the Beaumonts, asking them to look with particular care at a vague shadow he had circled with a yellow wax pencil.

'This,' he said. 'What's this?'

'How the hell should we know?' Glen asked.

'You're the goddam doctor.'

'Right,' Pritchard said dryly.

'The wife said it looked like he pitched a fit,'

Glen said.

Dr Pritchard said, 'If you mean he had a seizure, yes, he did. If you mean he had an epileptic seizure, I'm pretty sure he didn't. A seizure as serious as your son's would surely have been *grand mal*, and Thad showed no reaction whatever to the Litton Light Test. In fact, if Thad had *grand mal* epilepsy, you wouldn't need a doctor to point the fact out to you. He'd be doing the Watusi on the living room rug every time the picture on your TV set decided to roll.'

'Then what is it?' Shayla asked timidly.

Pritchard turned back to the X-ray mounted on the front of the light-box. 'What is that?' he responded, and tapped the circled area again. 'The sudden onset of headaches coupled with lack of any previous seizures suggest to me that your son has a brain tumor, probably small and probably benign.'

Glen Beaumont stared at the doctor stonily while his wife stood beside him and wept into her handkerchief. She wept without making a sound. This silent weeping was the result of years of spousal training. Glen's fists were fast and hurtful and almost never left marks, and after twelve years of silent sorrow, she probably could not have cried out loud even if she had wanted to.

'Does all this mean you want to cut his brains?' Glen asked with his usual tact and delicacy.

'I wouldn't put it quite that way, Mr Beaumont, but I believe exploratory surgery is called for, yes.' And he thought: *If there really is a God, and if He really made us in His Own image, I don't like to think about why there are so damned many men like this one walking around with the fates of so many others in their hands.*

Glen was silent for several long moments, his head down, his brow furrowed in thought. At last he raised his head and asked the question which troubled him most of all.

'Tell me the truth, doc — how much is all this gonna cost?'

The assisting O.R. nurse saw it first.

Her scream was shrill and shocking in the operating room, where the only sound for the last fifteen minutes had been Dr Pritchard's murmured commands, the hiss of the bulky life-support machinery, and the brief, high whine of the Negi saw.

She stumbled backward, struck a rolling Ross tray on which almost two dozen instruments had been neatly laid out, and knocked it over. It struck the tiled floor with an echoing clang which was followed by a number of smaller tinkling sounds.

'Hilary!' the head nurse shouted. Her voice was full of shock and surprise. She forgot herself so far as to actually take half a step toward the fleeing woman in her flapping green-gown.

Dr Albertson, who was assisting, kicked the head nurse briefly in the calf with one of his slippered feet. 'Remember where you are, please.'

'Yes, doctor.' She turned back at once, not even looking toward the O.R. door as it banged open and Hilary exited stage left, still screaming like a runaway fire engine.

'Get the hardware in the sterilizer,' Albertson said. 'Right away. Chop-chop.'

'Yes, doctor.'

She began to gather up the instruments, breathing hard, clearly flustered, but under control.

Pritchard seemed to have noticed none of this. He was looking into the window which had been carved in Thad Beaumont's skull with rapt attention.

'Incredible,' he murmured. 'Just incredible. This is really one for the books. If I wasn't seeing it with my own eyes —'

The hiss of the sterilizer seemed to wake him up, and he looked at Dr Albertson.

'I want suction,' he said sharply. He glanced at the nurse. 'And what the fuck are you doing? The *Sunday Times* crossword? Get your ass over here with those!'

She came, carrying the instruments in a fresh pan.

'Give me suction, Lester,' Pritchard said to Albertson. 'Right now. Then I'm going to show you something you never saw outside of a county fair freak-show.'

Albertson wheeled over the suction-pump, ignoring the head nurse, who leaped back out of the way, balancing the instruments deftly as she did so.

Pritchard was looking at the anesthesiologist.

'Give me good B.P., old hoss. Good B.P. is all I ask.'

'He's one-oh-five over sixty-eight, doctor. Steady as a rock.'

'Well, his mother says we've got the next William Shakespeare laid out here, so keep it that way. Suck on him, Al — don't tickle him with the goddam thing!'

Albertson applied suction, clearing the blood. The monitoring equipment beeped steadily, monotonously, comfortingly, in the background. Then it was his own breath he was sucking in. He felt as if someone had punched him high up in the belly.

'Oh my God. Oh Jesus. Jesus Christ.' He recoiled for a moment... then leaned in close. Over his mask and behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, his eyes were wide with sudden glinting curiosity. 'What is it?'

'I think you see what it is,' Pritchard said. 'It's just that it takes a second to get used to. I've read about it but never expected to actually see it.'

Thad Beaumont's brain was the color of a conch shell's outer edge — a medium gray with just the slightest tinge of rose.

Protruding from the smooth surface of the *dura* was a single blind and malformed human eye. The brain was pulsing slightly. The eye pulsed with it. It looked as if it was trying to wink at them. It was this — the look of the wink — which had driven the assisting nurse from the O.R.

'Jesus God, what is it?' Albertson asked again.

'It's nothing,' Pritchard said. 'Once it might have been part of a living, breathing human being. Now it's nothing. Except trouble, that is. And this happens to be trouble we can handle.'

Loring, the anesthesiologist, said: 'Permission to look, Dr Pritchard?'

'He still steady?'

'Yes.'

"The eye went on pulsing and trying to wink right up to the second when Pritchard used the needle-scalpel first to puncture and then to excise it"

'Come on, then. It's one to tell your grandchildren about. But be quick.'

While Loring had his look, Pritchard turned to Albertson. 'I want the Negli,' he said. 'I'm going to open him a little wider. Then we probe. I don't know if I can get all of it, but I'm going to get all of it I can.'

Albertson, now acting as head O.R. nurse, slapped the freshly sterilized probe into Pritchard's gloved hand when Pritchard called for it. Pritchard — who was now humming the *Bonanza* theme-song under his breath — worked the wound quickly and almost effortlessly, referring to the dental-type mirror mounted on the end of the probe only occasionally. He worked chiefly by sense of touch alone. Albertson would later say he had never witnessed such a thrilling piece of seat-of-the-pants surgery in his entire life.

In addition to the eye, they found part of a nostril, three fingernails, and two teeth. One of the teeth had a small cavity in it. The eye went on pulsing and trying to wink right up to the second when Pritchard used the needle-scalpel first to puncture and then to excise it. The entire operation, from initial probe to final excision, took only twenty-seven minutes. Five chunks of flesh plopped wetly into the stainless steel pan on the Ross tray beside Thad's shaven head.

'I think we're clear,' Pritchard said at last. 'All the foreign tissue seemed to be connected by rudimentary ganglia. Even if there are other chunks, I think the chances are good that we've killed them.'

'But... how can that be, if the kid's still alive?' I mean, it's all a part of him, isn't it?' Loring asked, bewildered.

Pritchard pointed toward the tray. 'We find an eye, some teeth, and a bunch of fingernails in this kid's head and you think it was a part of him? Did you see any of his nails missing? Want to check?'

But even cancer is just a part of the patient's own —

'This wasn't cancer,' Pritchard told him patiently. His hands went about their own work as he talked. 'In a great many deliveries where the mother gives birth to a single child, that child actually started existence as a twin, my friend. It may run as high as two in every ten. What happens to the other fetus? The stronger absorbs the weaker.'

'Absorbs it? Do you mean it eats it?' Loring asked. He looked a little green. 'Are we talking about in utero cannibalism here?'

'Call it whatever you like; it happens fairly often. If they ever develop the sonagram device they keep talking about at the med conferences, we may actually get to find out how often. But no matter how frequently or infrequently it happens, what we saw today is much more rare. Part of this boy's twin went unabsorbed. It happened to end up in his prefrontal lobe. It could just as easily have wound up in his intestines, his spleen, his spinal cord, anywhere. Usually the only doctors who see something like this are pathologists — it turns up in autopsies, and I've never heard of one where the foreign tissue was the cause of death.'

'What happened here?' Albertson asked.

'Something set this mass of tissue, which was probably sub-microscopic in size a year ago, going again. The growth clock of the absorbed twin, which should have run down forever at least a month before Mrs Beaumont gave birth, somehow got wound up again... and the damned thing actually started to run. There is no mystery about what

happened; the intercranial pressure alone was enough to cause the kid's headaches and the convulsion that got him here.'

'Yes,' Loring said softly, 'but why did it happen?'

Pritchard shook his head. 'If I'm still practising anything more demanding than my golf-stroke thirty years from now, you can ask me then. I might have an answer. All I know now is that I have located and excised a very specialized, very rare sort of tumor. A benign tumor. And, barring complications, I believe that's all the parents need to know. I can't see how I'd explain to the father, who would make Piltown Man look like one of the Quiz Kids, that I gave his eleven-year-old son an abortion. Al, let's close him up.'

And, as an afterthought, he added pleasantly to the O.R. nurse: 'I want that silly cunt who ran out of here fired. Make a note, please.'

'Yes, doctor.'

Thad Beaumont left the hospital twenty-three days after his surgery. The left side of his body was distressingly weak for nearly six months after, and occasionally, when he was very tired, he saw odd, not-quite-random patterns of flashing lights before his eyes.

His mother had bought him an old Remington 32 typewriter as a get-well-soon present, and these flashes of light happened most frequently when he was hunched over it in the hour before bedtime, struggling with the right way to say something or trying to figure out what should happen in the story he was writing. Eventually these passed, too.

That eerie, phantom chirruping sound — the sound of squadrons of sparrows on the wing — did not recur at all following the operation.

He continued to write, gaining confidence and polishing his emerging style, and he sold his first story — to *American Teen* — six years after his real life began. After that, he just never looked back.

So far as his parents or Thad himself ever knew, a small benign tumor had been removed from the prefrontal lobe of his brain in the autumn of his eleventh year. When he thought about it at all (which he did less and less frequently as the years passed), he thought only that he had been extremely lucky to survive.

Many patients who underwent brain surgery in those primitive days did not.

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"Five chunks of flesh plopped wetly into the stainless steel pan on the Ross tray beside Thad's shaven head"



DISSECTING STEPHEN KING

What do Stephen King and William Shakespeare have in common? Apart from a desire to write for the mass market, they are also two of the world's most written about authors. Stanley Wiater examines the growing body of criticism and analysis concerning the younger of the two writers.

If Stephen King is the most popular author in the world today, it should come as no great shock that he may also be the most written about author as well. In fact, at the rate studies are being published about him, it won't be too long before there are more volumes with "Stephen King" in the title than following the title. Since I am guilty of appearing in no less than three of these books, it seems fitting that a brief critical examination be taken of all the books of criticism issued so far on the undisputed master of contemporary horror.

As will readily become apparent, the majority of these studies have been published in America by New American Library, King's paperback publisher, and by Underwood-Miller, a specialty press known for its handsomely produced hardcover limited editions. The third publisher which has produced a number of King studies is Starmont House, another specialty house which publishes, almost exclusively, studies of authors in the horror, fantasy and science fiction genres. Unless otherwise noted, the books cited are still in print, many in inexpensive paperback editions.

Teacher's Manual: The Novels of Stephen King
By Edward J. Zagorski (NAL, 1981)
Out of print.

The very first examination of King, issued at no cost for high school teachers by the Education Department of New American Library. Although the title indicates that it deals just with

his novels, the final chapter deals with selected short stories as well. Considering the book's short extent (46 pages), Zagorski covers a considerable amount of ground, including 'An Historical Overview' and 'A Profile of Horror Fiction' even before getting down to examining the six novels King had published up to that time. Surprisingly worthwhile.

Stephen King
By Douglas E. Winter (Starmont House, 1982)
Issued in both hardcover and trade paperback editions; out of print.

The first version of what would later become *The Art of Darkness*, this is generally considered to be the first real analysis of King and is an earnest combination of biography and literary criticism. To all except the completist collector it has little value now, since Winter's reworked and updated text is still readily available.

Stephen King: The Art of Darkness
By Douglas E. Winter (NAL, 1984)
Published in hardcover and as a trade paperback; still available as an NAL paperback in a further revised state.

Greatly expanded from his volume for Starmont House, Winter's work is unquestionably the recognised authority on King. One of the best critics in the entire field, Winter has not only written a vibrant biography of King the man, he's also deftly penned an admirable critical portrait of the writer as well. It's doubtful if anyone is going to surpass the research Winter has undertaken. In 1986, the book was later revised and

expanded again after the Richard Bachman pseudonym was revealed. Incidentally, Winter has *The Stephen King Bibliography* in the works with Donald M. Grant. West Kingston, RI 02892 is slated to publish it, though when is anybody's guess, though it wouldn't surprise me to see a volume almost as lengthy as King's novel *It*.

Fear Itself: The Horror Fiction of Stephen King
Edited by Chuck Miller and Tim Underwood (Underwood-Miller, 1982)

Out of print in the hardcover limited editions. Still available as an NAL paperback. This is the first of the celebrity collection of essays on King. Besides boasting an introduction by King's best friend, Peter Straub, and afterword by George A. Romero, the contributors include Fritz Leiber ('Horror Hits a High'), Charles L. Grant ('The Grey Arena') and, of course, critic Douglas E. Winter. Long before the academics began their essay collections, editors/publishers Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller realised that there was a growing audience of fans who wished to know about every aspect of King's life and work. This is the first of three collections, where the publishers solicited essays by some of the best known horror writers and critics working today, to try and satisfy that audience.

Stephen King at the Movies
By Jessie Horsting (NAL/Starlog Press, 1986)

Published only as a trade paperback at \$9.95, this is the first—and still the best—examination of the movie adaptations of King's work. If you're going to make a choice between this book and any other one mentioned, this is decidedly the book to purchase. Not only does Horsting conduct an in depth interview with King, she also interviews all the directors (Romero, Cronenberg, Hooper, etc.) who have adapted his works to the silver screen. Quite simply, this author did her homework in compiling this volume, and it shows. An entertaining, as well as informative, overview.

The following books were issued by Starmont House and, at last report, remain in print at \$17.95 hardcover or \$9.95 trade paperback. They were published between 1985 and 1987)

Discovering Stephen King
Edited by Darrell Schweitzer
This is noted critic/author Schweitzer's contribution to the growing list of essay volumes. There are no literary superstars here, just intelligent critics

known in the horror and fantasy genres; among them Don Herron, Ben P. Indick and Gary William Crawford. These essays are quite insightful, ranging from 'Has Success Spoiled Stephen King?' to 'What Makes Him So Scary?'. The titles may be simplistic, but the editor has brought together a satisfactory gathering of critics who can intelligently place King's position within the genre without deifying him or destroying him.

The Many Facets of Stephen King
By Michael Collings
Stephen King as Richard Bachman

By Michael Collings
The Stephen King Phenomenon

By Michael Collings
The Films of Stephen King

By Michael Collings
The Annotated Guide to Stephen King
By Michael Collings
The Shorter Works of Stephen King
By Michael Collings and David Engbreton

Even without examining each title separately, you can readily assume from the titles alone what the basic contents are. They are the work of one man, Michael Collings, an associate professor of English at Pepperdine University. (Engbreton, who collaborated on one volume, is working on a study of Peter Straub and Whitley Strieber.) I have no idea what the length of this material would be if published in a single volume (each Starmont book averages 200 pages of small print), but it would certainly surpass anything anyone else has published on King. In terms of subject matter, if Collings hasn't covered it here, then we can safely assume that King hasn't written it yet, or never intends to. It's a massive effort for a single individual, though in some cases Collings is saying the same thing in a different way in a different book.

Kingdom of Fear: The World of Stephen King
Edited by Chuck Miller and Tim Underwood (Underwood-Miller, 1986). (New English Library, 1987)

Out of print in the limited edition hardcovers. Still available as an NAL paperback. The second 'celebrity' essay collection. Contributors include Robert Bloch ('Monsters in Our Midst'), Ramsey Campbell ('Welcome to Room 217'), Whitley Strieber ('Thanks to the Crypt Keeper'), and Clive Barker ('Surviving the Ride'), among others. Included as well is a memoir by Bill Thompson, the former editor at Doubleday

Books who, by accepting *Carrie* for publication, 'discovered' King. As with the previous collection, the often informal essays are most valuable for what they reveal about the horror writers themselves, and as an indication of how King's success has permanently changed many of their lives.

The Complete Stephen King: Volume One

By James Van Hise (Shuster and Shuster, 1987)
Out of print.

This slender volume (57 pages) is, in the author's words, 'a revision and updating' of an earlier work published in magazine format entitled *Enterprise Incidents Presents Stephen King*. (*Enterprise Incidents* was a short-lived magazine devoted primarily to the *Star Trek* phenomenon). Following the model of Zagoriski in his initial study, Van Hise examines each novel and short story King has written, and then give a brief critique of each. To date, the second volume has yet to be published, probably because the publisher of part one has since gone out of business. For a study with such a majestic title, it is woefully inadequate. Van Hise simply does not have enough space to allow anything more than the most rudimentary appraisal of King's work.

Stephen King Goes to Hollywood

By Jeff Conner; produced by Chuck Miller and Tim Underwood (NAL, 1987)

Available in hardcover \$19.95, and paperback at \$9.95. I'm not really sure what 'produced' by Underwood and Miller means, since the book clearly announces itself as 'written by Jeff Conner'. Conner, incidentally, is far better known as the mover and shaker behind Scream/Press, one of the finest specialty publishers in America. Unfortunately, this volume is basically a rehash of everything that's already been written about Mr King and his relationship with Hollywood. Indeed, the 'Interview With Stephen King' touted on the cover is not even a new interview by Conner as it was previously published in a magazine.

The Gothic World of Stephen King: Landscape of Nightmares

Edited by Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B Browne (The Popular Press, 1987)

Published in hardcover at \$25.95 and as a trade paperback at \$12.95.

The first essay collection from a true university press, Bowling Green in Ohio. The editors, both college professors, offer up examinations of King which are

decidedly more 'literary' than anything in the Underwood-Miller or Stormont volumes. They have solicited thirteen essays from a variety of academic scholars with a supposed interest in horror and the American Gothic. Although some essays such as 'Taking Stephen King Seriously: Reflections on a Decade of Bestsellers' are of interest because their point is readily made, others such as 'Stephen King's Creation of Horror in *Salem's Lot*: A Prolegomenon Towards a New Hermeneutic of the Gothic Novel' bends over backwards to try and make itself appear so highly intellectual. The fact that many of the essayists are not serious fans of King shows in the number of times his first name is misspelled 'Steven'.

Bare Bones: Conversations on Terror With Stephen King

Edited by Chuck Miller and Tim Underwood (Underwood-Miller, 1988)

This is a limited edition of 1,000 copies (at \$75), and consists of twenty-seven interviews with King, compiled from various sources between 1979 and 1987. The range of material remains, for the most part, fascinating, and includes his massive interviews conducted with *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines, as well as those featured in more obscure publications such as *Shogol* and *Fantasy Media*. Its major flaw is that the editors offer no introduction to explain how and why these interviews were selected, or the conditions under which they were conducted. Even so, its considerable success has led to a follow-up volume, which is slated for publication some time late in 1989.

Bare Bones: Conversations on Terror With Stephen King

Edited by Chuck Miller and Tim Underwood (McGraw-Hill, 1988; New English Library, 1989)

This is the trade hardcover, published at \$16.95. It should be noted that one of the interviews in the Underwood-Miller edition, 'Stephen King: The Maximum Overdrive Interview' by Stanley Wiater, was inadvertently omitted from this edition. It will, however, appear in the forthcoming McGraw-Hill - but not the Underwood-Miller limited - edition of *Bare Bones II*. (This is being stated hopefully to prevent future King bibliographers from going mad with the apparent inconsistencies!)

Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic

By Tony Magistrate (Popular Press, 1988)

Published in hardcover at \$25.95, and trade paperback at

\$12.95.

A college professor at the University of Vermont, Magistrate immediately makes it clear that he is a fan of the author's work. He further states that Douglas Winter's *Art of Darkness* is the best single volume out on King, and that one purpose of his book is to bring a greater examination to the major themes and recurring patterns in King's work which Winter could only touch upon. Magistrate offers an intelligent discussion of these themes, to wit: 'Motorised Monsters: The Betrayal of Technology' and 'Inherited Haunts: Stephen King's Terrible Children'. In seven chapters (which are designed to be read as interlocking essays), the author does a capable job of explaining what King's work means in a literary sense, without being too smug or pretentiously intellectual in his presentation. A good academic introduction.

Reign of Fear: Fiction and Film of Stephen King

Edited by Don Herron (Underwood-Miller, 1988)

Published so far only as a 1,000 copy hardcover at \$75, this is the third and, most likely, final collection of essays from this publisher. The writers include Guy N Smith ('Snowbound in the Overlook Hotel'), Peter Treymayne ('By Crouch End, in the Isles'), J N Williamson ('The Cycles - Tricycles and Hogs - of Horror'), and Stanley Wiater ('Reach Out and Touch Something: Blurbs And Stephen King'). In spite of the title, only one major essay - 'The Movies and Mr King, Part II' - deals with the film adaptations of King's work. A trade edition from NAL is all but inevitable.

Stephen King: The First Decade, Carrie to Pet Semetary

By Joseph Reino (Twayne Publishers, 1988)

Published in hardcover at \$17.95.

Yet another examination of King by a college professor. From the dust jacket copy you can get some idea of what lurks within its covers: 'Meticulously written, Reino's perceptive analysis reveals King as a Gothic master who offers an abysmally grim view of himself, his readers, and the malevolent universe in which we live. Eight provocative chapters, cohesively linked by in depth exploitation of King's psychosexual and psychodynamic themes, paint an evocative and eerie double portrait of Stephen King as both author and master manipulator of the most profound human emotion: sheer terror'. In spite of the copywriter's verbiage, this is a worthwhile companion volume to Winter's *Art of Darkness*.

So there you are. What's most important to note is that, in ten short years, King has gone from being dismissed by the critics as a 'bestselling hack' to attaining serious consideration as a 'major literary talent'. And the studies of King will no doubt continue to flow forth, right alongside the forthcoming novels and stories of his ever prolific imagination. (On the horizon is *The Unseen King* by Tyson Blur - *The Shape Under the Sheet: The Stephen King Encyclopedia* by Stephen J Spignesi). It's almost enough to make one wonder if there is a new cottage industry at work here, designed to dissect King's every word almost before the ink has had a chance to dry on the paper.

It's difficult to say when it will end; King himself is amazed that his popularity hasn't crested by now. And yet, even if there's not a lot more to be explored about this author's work, there's certainly more to be learned about horror writers and horror fiction in general. So no one should complain about the continuing deluge of books which focus on a single author. My belief is that every new reader of a King story will sooner or later try a story by Bloch, or Matheson, or McCammon, or Campbell, or Etchison, or Barker; or a book or movie that you or I may someday create. It's the same reason why there's a new publication like *FEAR* to keep us better informed on this ever more popular - and important - field. When you stop to consider the overall ramifications of King's phenomenal success, it would appear that we should simply send a vote of thanks to that author who sees no end in sight for his incredible literary career. Largely due to him, there's also no end in sight for the continuing success of *Horror* as a genre.

THE PUBLISHERS

Catalogues are available from:

New American Library
1633 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

Underwood-Miller
515 Chestnut Street
Columbia, PA 17512-1233

Stormont House
PO Box 851
Mercer Island, WA 98040

The Popular Press
Bowling Green University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

Twayne Publishers
70 Lincoln Street
Boston, MA 02111

Weighty Watcher

BY ADAM PAGE

This is an excerpt from Monty's 1989 diary. It's a page-a-day one with a cloth bookmark. He bought it in the January sales, at Boots.

*February 28, Tuesday, Moon's last quarter
Lovely morning. Had a long, hot soak in the bath and sang
My Way. Popped into town for a spot of shopping. Afternoon
- Minnie cremated. Wore a bright tie and sniggered a lot.
Couldn't help it. Lucky nobody else there. Evening in pub.
Won at dominoes.*

In many respects, Monty was no different from any other middle-aged husband. Most honest men will admit that, at least once in their lives, they would have liked to see their wives drop dead. What sets Monty apart from most men is the fact that, when his wife did just that, he thanked the Lord and laughed fit to burst.

It would be easy at this stage to condemn Monty as an unfeeling monster. Perhaps that is what he has become; we should, however, acquaint ourselves with all the facts before we pass judgement on him.

Here they are.

Monty was born in the year that witnessed the cancerous growth of Hitler's murderers throughout most of Europe. He spent his infant years living with his mother and her parents in a small, unremarkable village, the name of which is unimportant, in the north of England. Here they waited patiently for the war to end, secure in the knowledge that the uppity little paperhanger across the Channel would soon get what was coming to him and that everything would be back to normal by the following Christmas.

Monty never met his father. One of his earliest memories is of a grim-faced man with a hat and a bike handling his mother a buff-coloured piece of paper one sunny morning in 1944. She stood like a statue by the front door and didn't even scold Monty when he tripped on the carpet and overturned a china vase. Later he squatted by her feet in the garden, his attention divided equally between an earthworm slowly baking in the afternoon sun and the silent tears trickling down her ashen face. He had seen two women in the village cry, and they had blubbed and whined and blown noses; not his mother, she did it without the sound effects. When it became apparent that she was not going to pay any attention to him, he squashed the worm with his heel and skipped off to throw rocks at the birds.

Monty's gnarled old grandfather, himself a veteran of the First World War, would spin many a yarn about his son, the conquering hero. How he had captured a German platoon single-handed, had been the first to die on the beaches at Normandy. These

were but two of his heroic exploits, and for years Monty assumed that his father had risen from the dead in order to liberate Paris too. In fact Monty senior had drowned after falling blind drunk off the back of a landing craft. But he did get to the Normandy beaches. What remained of him slithered ashore like a giant beached starfish, about a week after the landings.

In the next decade, Monty did his own bit for his country. His period of national service saw him rise meteorically to the rank of lance corporal; his innate ability to think without moving his lips had paid off. He spent the next couple of years learning to run, jump, shave in cold water and insult Germans in their own language. By the time his service was over he was a master at saluting and his button polishing was second to none. He felt he had done his father proud; if only there'd been a war for him to fight in, how he could have shown them!

Minnie was a gangly, oafish streak of a girl; pleasant enough in her own way but with no past worth mentioning. She met Monty in the late 1950s, was courted by him, married him, set up house with him and was quite content to sit in it quietly expanding while he went out to earn them money. Neither partner was fool enough to think himself rapturously happy or deeply in love, but they were content enough with the choice they had made and quite prepared to accept it as their lot in life. After all, they were just ordinary folk and no different from anybody else. They spent their time together, in grey anonymity, for twenty-five years until Monty won half a million pounds on the football pools.

That was when things really started to go down hill, reflected Monty as he sat in the pub one day after it was all over. He was not one of those henpecked husbands who always seemed to crop up in those situation comedies on television that Minnie enjoyed so much, but then Minnie did have an uncanny knack of getting her own way. When, therefore, she suggested they move to one of those nice suburbs in the south, to a nice house with a drive and a patio, he had relented after only token resistance. Nothing too extravagant in that, he thought.

Minnie had always been something of a television addict. They would often sit in the same room all night and exchange no more than a couple of sentences. It was an arrangement that suited them both perfectly; Monty usually felt uncomfortable in a serious conversation and Minnie wouldn't have recognised one anyway. Monty was secretly glad that he had a wife who didn't talk too much - rather than a pestering battle-axe.

Once Minnie had ensconced herself in her own armchair in front of the box, Monty would settle down in his and leaf through the handsome set of encyclopaedias he had bought from that nice young man who had called round not long after they had settled into their new home. Their evenings would be spent in this manner, with Minnie's waistline expanding as Monty's mind improved. She drank in every new quiz show and soap opera with relish, and he discovered that the ancient Egyptians used to worship dung beetles. Their social life was an accurate reflection of their home life, and if any of their former neighbours had noticed they had gone, they did not care one way or the other. Of course, they did not know about the sudden good fortune: Monty's cross in that little box at the bottom of the pools coupon had seen to that.

Once installed in the new house Minnie decided that she would have whatever she wanted. She would not go mad with the money, of course. Monty had always worked for a living and would not be unnecessarily careless with money no matter how they had come by it. There would be no ostentatious car in the driveway or holidays abroad every couple of

**"His scalp
tightened, his
eyes goggled
wide, his
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to liquid . . .
because when
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wall started
this time he
knew exactly
where it was
coming from"**

months. Travel had never interested them; Minnie had never needed a driving licence and the Cortina was good enough for Monty's needs. Even that was being used less and less now that he had retired. For Minnie, the twenty-six inch stereosound television and video recorder in the lounge, the twenty inch set in the kitchen and the portable in the bedroom would suffice. Monty got himself a library membership card. The potential for home entertainment combined with a complete lack of desire for a social life induced a kind of agoraphobia in Minnie. Around about this time Monty began to feel a little uneasy, worried that his wife was watching perhaps too much television. Still, it kept her happy and left him free to do as he wished.

Soon Minnie was watching television constantly. As her appetite for it grew, so did her appetite for food. Monty, having exhausted the set of encyclopaedias, took to spending his afternoons in the reading rooms of the town library. Each morning, armed with the knowledge that the atomic number of osmium was seventy-six and that a yutca was not an Italian saloon car after all, he would set out for the library in his quest for self-improvement. He would thus spend much of the day out of the house, his near claustrophobia growing in proportion to Minnie's fear of anything not transmitted. No matter what time of day he came home, he would find her settled in front of one of the sets, nibbling at whatever new snack she had seen advertised and had ordered from the local supermarket. Often he would find her still in bed in the afternoon, a practice he loathed. His appeals to her fell on deaf ears.

Minnie's day took on a distinct pattern. First thing in the morning she would waddle and wheeze her way into the spacious kitchen, flick on the television which stood on the breakfast bar and heap a tray to straining point with food. Then she would go back to bed and watch the morning's programmes. After the midday soap, she would install herself in the groaning armchair in the lounge, her tray replenished. There she would remain for the rest of the viewing day which, with the advent of late night transmission, had lengthened alarmingly. Monty would have made one more attempt to wean her from her addiction, had not an unexpected incident convinced him that she was irrevocably hooked on the glow of cathode rays.

He was returning home one evening after spending the entire day in the reading rooms. In this way, there was little chance of being drawn into a conversation in which he would unwittingly admit the existence of Minnie. The mere idea of it appalled him, so he would lie about her if he had to.

Although it was a three mile walk from the library, he would make the journey on foot rather than use the car. That way he spent less time in the house and didn't have her constant presence to prey on his nerves. The weather on the night in question was particularly inclement, the November wind gnawed at his ears and the stinging rain ate with monotonous persistence into his downcast face. He would usually kill some time at the end of the street by smoking a cigarette, seeking a false warmth from the soft yellow glow of the street lamp on the corner. He struggled to light the untipped cigarette under the makeshift canopy of his overcoat. He was successful at the third attempt and only managed it by striking two matches together; he had never had time for lighters. He stood with his hands cupped around the tiny spark as the cruel wind whipped away the wisps of blue smoke and lukewarm breath from his tired lungs.

Then it was black. When the electricity cut out the entire street, houses and all, was plunged into an inky darkness, as if the earth had swallowed it up; a darkness made more eerie by the abrupt dropping of the wall. Down the street the lights faded rapidly to a

dull scarlet and were engulfed by the night, like dying fireflies.

Monty felt at peace. He was overwhelmed by a sudden sense of calm, a quiet, carefree calm he had not experienced for a long time. Even the dolorous, unearthly wailing of a neighbour's tom cat did not disturb him as he stood like a sentry under the dead lamp. The red cigarette end became the centre of his own little universe. He felt warm. He sensed the unwelcome worries of his life evaporate and mingle with the smoke. He closed his eyes and smiled for the first time in a lifetime.

When he had finished the first cigarette and was about to light another, the wind revived itself and dragged his consciousness back. He noticed for the first time the noise the cat was making and contemplated this while lighting up again. He wondered that such a small animal could produce such a racket, and when he realised it reminded him of a distraught baby crying through a megaphone, he grew annoyed at having his blissful reverie shattered. But like most of us, Monty considered it a virtue to bestow human kindness on small animals and, having come to the natural conclusion that this particular one must be in distress, he resolved to see what he could do to help it.

Like a spectre in the filtered moonlight he silently crossed the road to the line of trees opposite. He strained his myopic eyes in the gloom until his neck ached. The soft hissing noises he had supposed would be soothing to a troubled cat seemed to have no effect, so he stopped making them. All the while the ghastly cacophony continued, rising and falling yet never letting up for a moment. Monty's unease grew with it. Thinking it may have been crouching under one of the parked cars, he squatted like a monstrous frog under the tree, searching with his eyes along the gutter, but the darkness was stronger than his vision and he gave up.

In the end he decided that, even if he had been able to determine its location, there would be very little, if anything, he could actually do to help the wretched creature. Besides, his ageing frame had had enough darkness, cold and unrest for one night, and the damned things were supposed to have nine lives anyway. The hideous noise had all but destroyed his nerves. Telling himself that, under the circumstances, a return home would be lesser of two evils, he decided to leave the cat to its fate.

The power returned with suddenness that almost blinded him. He allowed himself a sigh of relief as the horrible wailing ceased at the same moment. Almost chuckling to himself at the idea of a nocturnal animal afraid of the dark he decided on one last cigarette to enjoy in the momentary peace. With stiff, icy fingers (he had left his thermal gloves at home) he fumbled in his pockets for the pack of cigarettes, took one from the box and put it between his lips. Unconsciously turning to face in the direction of his own house he found the box of matches. His fingers were so numb with cold that he dropped the first match and couldn't be bothered to pick it up. He managed to grasp one at the second attempt but the head snapped off as he struck it. Tutting to himself and cursing the tiny piece of wood, he tried with a third and found success, just as the lights flickered and died again.

With the burning splinter inches from his face, he froze. His scalp tightened, his eyes goggled wide, his bowels turned to liquid, his heart turned to stone and his spine tingled as a million tiny icicles sprouted under his skin; because when the banshee wail started this time he knew exactly where it was coming from.

Monty stood rooted to the spot, staring, until the burning sensation in his fingertips jerked his numbed senses into action. He moved in a trance



ADAM PAGE is a computer programmer, sort of, but urges people not to hold it against him. He is not a member of MENSA, has not travelled widely, but has two senses of humour. This is the first story he has had published.

"For the first time in his life he was experiencing the fear of the unknown"

across the street, tripped up the kerb, walked to the gate, up the drive, onto the step outside the front door. His feet were as heavy as cold lead. For the first time in his life he was experiencing fear of the unknown.

He rummaged in his trousers pocket for the key whilst glancing back over his shoulder, wondering why it was that the mournful howling had not attracted more attention; then he remembered that their good fortune had enabled them to avoid the built-up districts of the town. Breathing silent thanks for this, he slipped the key into the lock and opened the door. The clamour, which was loud enough outside the door, hit him like a rubber hammer and before he realised what he was doing he leaned over, grabbed the doorknob and pulled the door shut again. Then, knowing he would have to go in sooner or later, he took a deep breath, opened the door again, climbed the two steps and went inside.

The lobby door was open. An insipid, red glow oozed from beneath the lounge door at the other end of the hall and made as if to creep along the carpet towards him, but it was kept at bay by the dark. To Monty's added wits nothing seemed normal. As he stood on the doormat (WELCOME) his long-dormant imagination conjured up a picture of his own private hell. The wailing had him in its irresistible grip and he was drawn along the hall. His legs refused to turn round and take him away. He stole himself. The lounge door was ajar. He pushed it open and took a step inside.

The gas fire was on its highest setting, as he knew it must have been, smearing everything with a film of dirty orange. Monty started – for the first thing he saw as he entered was a terrified, red face pleading with him, screaming at him. Something was wrong with it; it was too small to be Minnie's. Then he understood what it was and the room stopped spinning. The huge television faced the doorway and what his eyes had seen was her abominable shrunken head floating on the blank screen, although she was sitting directly in front of him he had not seen her.

"The first thing he saw as he entered was a terrified red face pleading with him, screaming at him"

He spoke her name but the word was lost in her impenetrable howling. He regained control of his legs and walked unsteadily round to where he could see her face; immediately, he wished that he hadn't. She sat jammed into the roomy armchair, almost spilling over the sides, her wide, glassy eyes trained hypnotically on her own image on the screen. Monty spoke her name again, then almost yelled it, but he may as well not have bothered. She did not even know he was there. The dreadful bawling continued, punctuated only by short, jerking sobs. Her belated television had died and her world had fallen apart.

Monty sank into the welcoming cushions of the sofa. His fear and discomfort gradually faded as the heat from the gas fire thawed his aching limbs. He lay his head back and closed his eyes as if to shut out the noise, but it had the power of a pneumatic drill. He felt incensed; he was a simple, decent, law-abiding man who certainly did not deserve the hand Fate had dealt him. He opened his tired eyes and contemplated the obese, quivering heap of blubber in the armchair. The seed of an idea implanted itself deep in his brain, an unwelcome idea which luckily was not allowed the time to germinate, since the power chose that moment to come back on.

He shielded his eyes as the harsh light pierced them, dispersing the dark and with it the infernal firelight. As suddenly as the light returned, the unearthly racket died and was replaced by the inane chatter of a particularly reptilian games show host giving away holidays and fabulous his 'n' hers matching nose hair clippers. Minnie's transformation was remarkable. Her expression had changed as if at the flick of a switch from one of abject despondency to sheer, childish delight.

Monty studied the piles of empty potato crisps

packets (family size), the innumerable chocolate wrappers, the half-eaten sandwiches and the other debris scattered round Minnie's feet; the buttons on her blouse straining and hanging on for what grim life they possessed; the damp patch round her neck caused by copious tears; the spellbound eyes almost popping right out of the pasty, puffy flesh; and the sweaty, fidgety stumps of fingers clutching the remote control device. He was overwhelmed with pity because she had never been a bad woman, and now she was little more than an inflated vegetable.

He rose, not wanting to look at the sorry spectacle any longer than he had to. He made himself a pot of tea in the kitchen, switching off the television set in there as he did so. He went upstairs and made up the bed in the redundant guest room. It had been a hard day and, as he drifted fitfully into a much-needed sleep, the nagging uncertainty at the back of his mind that he had missed something was clarified. He had sat and watched Minnie for a good half hour after the power returned and hadn't seen her blink once.

Over the next few weeks Monty saw as little as possible of his wife. By sleeping in the guest room and leaving the house early in the morning he found it easy to avoid her. As far as he could tell, she did not wash any longer in the morning, and he doubted that the bath could accommodate her massive bulk. She definitely did not use soap, toothpaste or deodorant any more; the toiletries on her side of the bathroom cabinet remained untouched.

Monty resigned himself to his new lifestyle. It was an arrangement that he did not consider ideal, but he wished Minnie no harm and since he had never been one to spend his days in the pursuit of happiness he was prepared to accept it. He had always taken pride in the fact that she was permitted to do what she wanted as long as she made no attempt to control his life. He was not a tyrant, so if she did nothing but eat and watch television all day long then she could do so without fear of intervention from him. Although he deplored her world, he accepted it. He was still married to her, until death parted them. If only she would wash occasionally.

He only regretted his decision when he had the misfortune to bump into her, literally. One day, on his return home, he had decided to venture into the kitchen for a quick snack before going to bed. His walks usually gave him a hearty appetite and he always found it easier to sleep with something in his stomach; on this occasion he was feeling a little under the weather and was consequently quite ravenous.

He walked past the lounge door, involuntarily wrinkling his nose at the smell which ambushed him. He was about to enter the kitchen when he collided with her on her way out. As luck would have it, the light bulb had failed but this didn't bother her since she could fill up her tray by the light of the kitchen television and the fridge. She was waddling out backwards, unable to tear her eyes from the screen even for a second. Monty leapt back down the hall as his initial shock gave way to disbelief at the sheer size of her. He watched open-mouthed as she manoeuvred herself sideways, like a crab, into the lounge. She was now too fat to walk in forwards. When he heard the sofa groan under its burden (she had outgrown the armchair) he went upstairs, brushed his teeth and went to bed. He had lost his appetite.

The next day he woke barely able to breathe. The severe cold and his twice-daily walks had taken their toll and he had contracted influenza. As much as he needed to get up and leave, his aching arms and legs, watery eyes and the rasping cough that threatened to burst open his chest convinced him otherwise. For two days he lay and sweated in bed. By

the end of the second day he felt slightly better; but he was puzzled. For two solid days he hadn't heard her come upstairs at all and he hadn't heard the drone of the bedroom television in the mornings.

Next day he felt much healthier, although he had not eaten for two days. He washed, shaved and dressed and started down the stairs. His 'flu had not completely cleared up but he was only too aware of the awful smell crawling up the stairway, so it was with some trepidation that he headed towards the kitchen. He stopped for a second to blow his nose and his ears popped leaving him temporarily deaf. He was standing outside the lounge; it was silent. He eased open the door and stared at the piles of rubbish strewn about the room, Minnie was not there, nor was the sofa. It took him a minute to realise that the television was switched off, standing dumb and cold in the corner. As his hearing returned he became aware of the noise coming from the kitchen and suddenly understood what she had done.

He opened the kitchen door. The stench hit him and he reeled. It was a large kitchen, easily roomy enough to accommodate the sofa she had heaved in. It could not have been an easy task (it had needed two men to get it into the house) but, he thought, in her present state it would have taken more than two doorways, a narrow passage and a breakfast bar to defeat her.

In the corner by the back door were stacked cartons of potato crisps (assorted flavours), biscuits, exceedingly good cakes and crate of soft drinks (10% free). She had obviously arranged regular deliveries before her sausage fingers were too big to fit the telephone dial. The sofa was jammed in between the unused cooker and the fitted units that lined the other wall, within easy reach of the boxes of convenience food, and as close as possible to the breakfast bar. On top of this perched the television, about four feet from Minnie's upturned face. She would have been closer to it had she been able to sit up straight for more than ten seconds.

It was the first unobstructed view of her Monty had in over a month and, though he already knew she was grossly overweight, he was unprepared for it. She was almost spherical and her height made her appear even more intimidating. His first feelings were of revulsion and nausea, incredulous that he was actually married to it, that it shared his name and his home. His subsequent thought was something to do with that McWhirter chap and his book of records, but he dismissed this from his mind. Her left arm (it was conical) fed an uninterrupted flow of junk into the slobbering hole whilst her right gripped the remote handset as if it were a lifeline. If her knuckles had been visible under the squidgy layers they would have been as white as her face. Had her teeth not been false they would undoubtedly have rotted; as it was they had merely turned brown, defenceless under the constant barrage.

The buttons on her marquee housecoat had long since capitulated, knowing theirs was a lost cause. Now it gaped open, unable to contain the growing mountain inside it, exposing the soiled nightdress. This was obviously under the same strain that had despatched the buttons and would probably not last much longer. He imagined he could hear the stitching creak each time the wedge of flab was raised to the mouth. A determined child let loose with a lump of modelling clay could not have fashioned a more grotesque travesty of humanity. Having run out of adjectives, Monty spun on his heel and went upstairs. He packed a few essential items of clothing into his dusty cardboard suitcase, went back downstairs, walked out of the house and turned his back on his home. He allowed himself the luxury of a bus ride into town and took a room in a small hotel for an indefinite period. He could easily afford it.

He felt an immense burden being lifted from his shoulders. He had never been one to hanker after excitement but now thought that he had the opportunity to start again. He may have been approaching fifty but now he felt almost young and found himself in the enviable position of being able to do what he wanted and having the money to do it with. He wouldn't rush headlong into it though; first he needed to recuperate.

If Monty had made any friends when he moved south they would have barely recognised him now. The small, anonymous chap with the permanently doleful expression, who never said a word to anyone, was gone. The regulars in the reading room, all little grey men themselves, had seen him almost every day for months. When he bounced in one chilly morning resplendent in new overcoat, hat and scarf, his face split in two by a beaming smile, not one of them realised who he was. His enthusiastic 'good morning' left them disapproving and dumbstruck.

For the first time since his youth he had a social life and relished every moment of it. Before too long he became a regular sight at his local public house and could be seen there most days of the week, afternoon or evening, lounging against the bar or engaged in a heated game of dominoes. The dam in his vocal chords had been breached and he committed himself to making up for his long years of reclusive silence. If he had a fault it was his universal generosity, which undoubtedly accounted for much of his popularity. As Monty made new friends, however, the inevitable question was asked. Was he married? Faced with the prospect of admitting the truth, he would say his wife had died a few months earlier. The first time he was asked he said he had never married, then found himself having to explain why he wore a wedding ring, so now he admitted to being a widower. His own belief that this was very close to the truth made it easier to lie.

He knew, of course, that soon he would have to go back to the house if only to collect a few belongings. As it turned out, one of his new acquaintances lived not far away from there, and one day he set out to walk (another habit he found hard to break) to his friend's home. He lost himself in a daydream and was not surprised when he snapped out of it on the corner of his old street, just yards away from the end of the drive. It would have taken no more than ten minutes to backtrack to his friend's house, but with a shrug of resignation he continued. He smoked a hasty cigarette under the lamp, chiding himself for feeling nervous. He stubbed it out, walked down the street and turned up the drive. Further down the road, on the same side, was a parked car; Monty did not see its two occupants watching him.

He looked up at the house and at the drawn curtains. The gleaming white satellite dish, quite brilliant in the afternoon sun, did not surprise him. He was sure he was wasting his time and did not know what he expected to accomplish by being there, but he felt an invisible rope pulling him towards the house. He paused at the top of the drive to catch his breath; his spreading waistline and tarred lungs were protesting. As he approached the door the men in the car never took their eyes off him. Monty stopped dead, hesitated and retreated a couple of steps, whipping a handkerchief from his pocket and holding it to his nose. One of the men, the taller of the two, grinned.

The abominable stench, twice as strong as before, assaulted his nose. It slithered to the back of his throat and left a revolting taste in his mouth. Barely resisting the urge to vomit, he walked halfway back down the drive and lit another cigarette in an attempt to smother the taste. With his mind in a turmoil, he looked straight at the parked car without seeing it. He resolved to enter the house, to get it over with once and for all. Then he'd leave and never come back. Clutching the

**"The
putrescent
hulk was
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shift it"**

handkerchief to his mouth he strode up to the door and inserted his key.

When he opened the door two things immediately struck him. The first was the door itself, which had been wedged against a mountain of free newspapers and leaflets. He bounced back down the steps cursing and rubbing his temple. The second was the stink. It was so bad he could not tell whether his eyes were watering because of it, or his accident with the door. When he had regained his composure and satisfied himself that he wasn't bleeding, he eased the door open and squeezed his body inside. Once in the lobby, he lost the struggle and brought up his lunch. Down in the street the tall man was opening the car door.

It was then that he noticed the silence. He closed his eyes and concentrated but could not hear a sound. He was in a state of confusion; there was no power cut this time because the hall light was switched on. He pushed the lobby door open slightly and saw Minnie. At first he thought she must have heard his key in the lock and come to greet him, and he had almost turned to run out of the house when he noticed she was standing still. In fact, she was dead. Monty's head spun; if she was so obviously dead, why was she standing up?

He moved sluggishly, as if through treacle, towards the kitchen doorway in which she was standing and came to a halt about six feet from Minnie's gargantuan corpse. The foul odour was so intense at this range he almost had to wade through it. He had to jerk his head to take his gaze from the eyes, the apathetic dead-fish eyes which had told him she was dead as soon as he saw them. Although she had apparently been dead for a few days he could not rid of himself of the uncomfortable feeling that he was being watched. When he had managed to wrench his own eyes from the bloated, grey face he discovered the reason why she was standing up and had to stifle an insane urge to giggle. The putrescent hulk was trapped in the door frame, like a blood clot in a vein, and looked as if nothing on earth would shift it; gravity was evidently not strong enough to do the job. He recognised the same stained nightdress and housecoat she had been wearing the last time he had seen her, about six weeks before.

That was probably the last time she had been outside the kitchen, he thought. The smooth black box of the remote control protruded from her right hand in stark contrast to the anaemic stumps which, even in death, refused to let it go. The left hand was coated in chocolate and peppered with stale yellow fragments of potato crisps, assorted flavours.

Outside in the street, as evening began to close in, the tall man was yawning and stretching and coherent thoughts were reviving Monty's poor befuddled brain. What on earth had happened?

Because the corpse was so tall and so wide he couldn't see past it into the kitchen. He turned and went into the lounge, studying the scene with filmy eyes. Nothing in there had changed. He jumped up and down in the hallway, craning his neck to catch a glimpse of the kitchen, but it was pointless. He would go around the house and try the back door. He stumbled over, took a few deep breaths and walked round, ignorant of the tall black-coated man at the bottom of the drive. He ploughed through the boxes, paper, plastic bags and bottles and opened the back door. It had most likely been left unlocked for the delivery man who, as it happened, had not been for a few days because the bill had not been paid. He entered the kitchen.

The rear view of the carcass was infinitely easier on the eye; there was no hideous face to intimidate its owner. He found it a relatively simple matter to ignore it and devote all his attention to the television which was now facing him over the sofa. It was switched on. Confused, he went over to examine it more closely, as the man outside hesitantly approached the front door,

his handkerchief to his nose. As far as Monty could tell the set was in perfect working order except for the complete absence of sound. The speaker must have melted, exploded or just died under the constant strain. He switched it off and pondered what must have happened.

What had happened, in fact, was this.

Minnie had been sitting in front of the television as usual. Nothing had changed when Monty walked out. One day, about a week before his return, the sound had suddenly faded and died. What was left of her mind suggested it might be a fault transmission; it happened occasionally, so she did not worry unduly. She waited. Then, after the fat fingers had stabbed furiously at the defenceless buttons on the handset with no result, she let out an involuntary wail of rage that must have been heard at the other end of the street (in fact it was, but old Mrs Tibbs at number nine thought it was an air raid warning and spent the next six hours crouched in the cupboards under the stairs). When she at last remembered the set in the lounge, the wail fizzled to a whimper and, by rocking to and fro several times, she managed to heave herself to her feet. She had not seen her feet in a long time but she knew they were there, she could feel them. With speed and agility surprising in one so massive, she steered her hundredweights round the breakfast bar and, travelling at a considerable pace, encountered the door.

If the door in question had been closed it would have saved her life, or at least prolonged it for a little while; it wasn't, so it didn't. Her colossal size and weight conspired with her velocity to stuff her into the frame as securely as a cork in a wine bottle. Her panicked convulsions served only to wedge her in even further. And there she remained, like a dervish beach ball, flailing her arms and bellowing, never loosening her grip on the handset. After about a minute, her heart gave up and stopped. It had been lying dormant just waiting for such an excuse.

That is what happened, and that is how Monty found her.

The deafening pounding on the front door almost gave him a heart attack. For one awful second he thought she had come back to life. He swallowed his heart and listened. The relentless hammering threatened to smash the door, but nothing on God's earth would have induced him to get to it via Minnie's remains, even if he had been able to. He would have to go out the back door and retrace his steps. At least it would give him an opportunity to get out of the house, which right then was what he wanted more than anything else in the world, with the possible exception of a gas mask.

He stumbled through the wreckage of Minnie's last meal, opened the door and walked briskly along the side of the house. He was about to turn the corner when he collided with the man coming in his direction. The visitor held a black vinyl clipboard in one leather-gloved hand and a handkerchief in the other.

'Mftr Ulp?'

Monty frowned at him. The man took the handkerchief from his face and tried again.

'Mr Whelp?'

'Yft,' replied Monty, who had no intention of removing his.

'I'm from the television licence records office', the man said. 'According to our records your TV licence expired three months ago and hasn't been renewed, despite several reminders. Obviously, if you've renewed it within the last couple of days . . .'

He stopped, because he could see that Monty wasn't listening to him. The neat little man's knees had buckled and he was leaning against the wall, laughing so hard he couldn't hear a word.

"Her left arm fed an uninterrupted flow of junk into the slobbering hole whilst her right gripped the remote handset as if it were a lifeline"



DREYFUSS DOGS

By
Simon D Ings

Blood filled my mouth, and I awoke.
'Dogs,' I choked out. Jude reached up and tapped the rear-view mirror. I sat up and looked out the back, was dazzled by headlights about eighty yards behind us. They gained slowly.

'How long's it been there?'

'Six, seven minutes. What do I do?' Jude was scared. I didn't blame her.

The car was now less than a safe braking distance from us.

'Could they be police?' she asked.

'Were you speeding?'

'Ten above.'

'Then it could be.'

'Why should it bother plain clothes?'

She was right. Our tail was an unmarked saloon.

It accelerated, overtook us and braked sharply on entering our lane. Its horn sounded. Jude had no choice but to cross to the hard shoulder and stop. The saloon pulled up about thirty yards ahead.

Jude cut the ignition. I ran my fingers through my hair, took a few deep breaths. Dog scent assaulted my aching head.

A burly, black-suited man climbed out of the car and walked over. Jude lowered her window and he came to lean his right arm on its sill.

'Police. Driver's licence please.'

'Identification?' Jude said.

The man reached into the inside pocket of his suit and pulled out a small plastic card. Jude made to take it, but he drew it out of her reach and slipped it back out of sight.

'May I see your licence?'

He had an r-p accent. I was suspicious of that but, I figured, why should all cops be bumpkins?

Jude reached for the glove compartment.

'Slowly.'

'Sorry,' Jude murmured. She undid the catch of the compartment and drew the lid gently down. I made to reach in and hand her the licence.

'No.'

'I was . . .'

'No.'

I shrugged, lay back in my seat and let Jude fumble for the wallet. She picked it out, leaned back in slow motion and handed it to the cop.

'Put the light on,' he said.

Jude reached for the switch.

'No. You. Light.'

I reached up.

'Slowly.'

I switched the light on.

He glanced over the licence and called over to me.

'Yours.'

'But I'm not driving.'

'Licence please.'

I reached into my pocket and, bit by bit, took it out. I leaned across Jude to hand it him.

'Where are you headed?'

'Kettering,' Jude replied.

'Where've you been?'

'Leeds.'

'What's your business in Kettering?'

Jude made some reply I didn't catch, for I'd spotted another heavy getting out of the car.

'Why the company?' I broke in.

This man went round to my side and tapped on the window.

I pressed the button that lowered it.

'Step out of the car please.'

'What's the problem?'

'No problem.'

I clipped the door open, climbed out.

'Name?'

'Harold Baker.'

'Full name.'

'I don't have any middle names.'

'What's her name?'

'Judy Branwell. Look, what's the matter?'

'Turn around. Face the car, place your hands on the roof, stand straddled.'
The first man opened the driver's door and motioned Jude out. She obeyed, and assumed the position I had

"The blood and flesh in my mouth swelled, pressed, exploded, levelled the gulf between it and me"

been ordered to adopt.

'Why are you driving at this hour?' I closed my eyes. Blood re-entered my mouth and began to take on structure. At first like egg-white in water, it grew tougher, sprouted veins, bands of muscle: brittle bone jammed between my teeth.

By this time, I had a firm image of the dog in the saloon. The blood and flesh in my mouth swelled, pressed, exploded, levelled the gulf between it and me. I felt new limbs sprout like lilacs from the four corners of my body. I yelped, panted, stood splayed-legged, a puppy, a tiny nerve-wolf.

Vision returned. I found myself in a wide phosphorescent blue field set against a red sky. From the blood-pulse heavens, suspended by a huge rusted chain, there hung a giant fish hook. I scampered across the field, leapt up and seized the hook with my teeth. The black iron screamed, turned to yellow vegetable rotteness, and fell upwards to nothing.

If a dog can laugh, I laughed, then leapt and tore the sky-Rich blood blinded me.

When next I opened my eyes, it was to face a woman. She sat on the back seat of the car; I was at her feet. I scrambled up beside her. She glanced at me and absently patted my head. She, I knew, was the handler of the dog I now possessed. I lifted myself up with my forepaws to look out the back window and re-orient myself. I was in the saloon of our self-styled policeman. Out the back I could see my prostrate form; the man who had ordered me out into the road knelt by me, while his companion pinned Jude to the side of the car. It was time.

I drew back my lips and backed down onto the seat. The woman didn't turn, she merely closed her eyes. I growled. Her right hand balled into a fist, an autonomic reaction as she tried to take tighter hold of the dog's psychic leash – a leash she held no longer. I snapped at her. She stared at me, uncomprehending, too surprised to fear. I lunged and bit her hand, heard bones snap. In silence she turned, opened the door with her sound hand, and rolled out. I leapt out with her and ran, four feet propelling my two hundred and thirty pound frame towards the car Jude and I had driven.

I leapt, took the man down who knelt by me in a flurry of teeth and torn throat, then scrambled round to the other side of the car. The man here held Jude to him as a shield, one arm under her breasts, the other across her hips. I raised myself up onto my hind legs, and tore his face off. I padded back to the saloon, leapt onto its bonnet and down onto the woman who lay behind it. Still she did not scream.

When it was over I lay down and closed my eyes. To return was easy but uncomfortable. There was blood on my cheek. I pushed myself up into a kneeling position, fought against nausea. I reached up to my temple, touched raw flesh, and winced. I felt sick and bruised. I got up off the ground and found Jude sitting on the bonnet of our car with her face in her hands. She turned.

'You okay?'

I nodded. 'You?'

About four years ago, the Dreyfuss Corporation of Montreal came up with a new combined surveillance and weapons system. It is used by police forces, government security agencies, paramilitary organisations and intelligence departments across the developed globe.

A delicate spindle of coded conductive gel is webbed to the Betz cells of a dog's motor cortex. This spindle transmits and receives signals from a similar structure webbed to the amygdala in a human brain.

The dogs 'leashed' to human operators in this way are genetically optimised for combat. They were developed from Schnauser stock. Now in their

seventeenth generation, they can weigh up to two hundred and thirty pounds and stand four-and-a-half feet at the shoulder. They give a man better sight, smell and hearing, an attack speed of twenty five mph, two-inch claws, and teeth that crunch bones like matchwood.

The Dreyfuss dog is at once the most baroque and efficient security system yet devised.

The Dreyfuss Corp rearranged their entire management and production structures around this product. They tested the security and strength of their psychic leash to the 'n'th degree.

To be fair, I was something they could never have predicted.

We arrived in London – our actual destination – at around 6.30 pm the following evening. All day had been spent renting cars we would not collect, booking hotel rooms we would never visit, and reserving seats in trains, coaches and aeroplanes we did not intend to catch. We hoped that this would throw our hunters off the scent at least for the night.

We abandoned the car in a Kennington back street and went straight to the Underground. In the lift Jude removed the makeshift cotton wool and microphone bandage from my temple and examined the cut.

'How does it feel?' she asked.

'Okay,' I replied. It still ached and I found it hard to concentrate. But that could just have been tiredness.

'It's only surface. It's beginning to heal. In a couple of days we'll have time to go to casualty.'

'You're joking.'

'If getting you a tetanus jab helps them find us I'll be very surprised. Besides, Henry can hack the Shepherd file into the City in a matter of days. When that happens they'll have too much on their plate to worry about us.'

I shrugged. 'Maybe.'

Back in the Seventies, it was Russia Dock. Now it's a landscaped strip of spray-sown grass, clumps of sickly trees, stagnant streams and metal high-backed benches, all lit by bright fluorescents to deter city detritus. It goes by the name of Reveley Park and separates an estate of crumbling matchwood bedsits thrown up in the mid Eighties from a light industrial estate owned exclusively by the Dreyfuss Corporation.

A wide brick path stretches the length of the park. We followed this almost to its end, then Jude took my hand and led me up a short gravelled incline, then perhaps thirty yards more across damp, close-mown grass to the forbiddingly high fence surrounding the Dreyfuss Corporation site. Behind the fence, a sharp road levelled to an unlit stretch upon which had been thrown together some cheap-looking industrial buildings. Not much to look at, they nevertheless contained some of the more baroque genetic fantasies of Dreyfuss Corp's prime mobile, Dr Gabriel Shepherd.

The scent of Dreyfuss dogs was strong here, and made me uneasy. Jude nudged me and pointed to a black-on-black shadow, as it loped across the field, parallel to the fence. Its bitter steroid odour buzzed behind my eyes.

I couldn't understand how Jude could once have worked here.

She had been Dr Shepherd's brightest protégée. Trained in gene-model simulation, she was employed to translate the diseased imaginings of this latter-day Mengele into images comprehensible to the Corporation's layman directors.

We left the fence, crossed to the gravel track, and got back to the brick pathway. A side-alley between two houses the other side of the park led to the Reveley Lock Estate. We turned down an ill-lit pathway. To our right ran a stream contained by worked stone – part of the original dock? – while to the left ran a line of

"I lunged and bit her hand, heard bones snap"

detached houses.

Number four Reveley Walk stood in darkness. We went up and peered in through the windows. It looked hardly lived in. Jude went to work on the door with a credit card.

I closed my eyes and prayed our chutzpah would pay off.

This was Dr Shephard's new house. According to Jude, he'd been working with the Surrey Docks team night and day on a new leashed-weapon project and had decided to move home from darkest Cumbria to the metropolis for convenience's sake. This now meant that a home terminal (he did much of his preliminary work on a private desk-top computer) could be connected by cable to the Surrey site. Up until now, the Dreyfuss estate mainframe and Shephard's terminal had communicated via telephone coupling only – not the most secure arrangement.

By Jude's reckoning, Shephard was due to move in very soon. The terminal would have been installed by now. We were banking on it being on-line. If it wasn't, our evidence would have to remain inconclusive and the whole business would have been in vain. Unless we had hard documentary evidence of Shephard's forays into vivisection, the UN Court of Human Rights would laugh us right back to base one and into the waiting claws of Dreyfuss Corp.

That prospect, frankly, terrified me. The only chance I had of a long and happy life lay in Shephard's indictment and conviction. The Corporation had to be warned off their more outré experiments or I was not long for this world.

I used to work in Dreyfuss Europe's main patents office and it was there that I – and others – discovered my unique talent. I did not need neural prostheses to control Dreyfuss dogs.

Free, I was the Corporation's biggest liability. In their hands, I was Gabriel Shephard's most interesting specimen.

Jude was differently motivated.

She was driven, so she claimed, by humanitarian sentiments. For eighteen months she had looked on as her superior had cut up the living brains of thirty-week-old foetuses, brain-dead and brain-damaged adults. She knew enough to convict the Corporation's R&D department and destroy the company's public reputation. Her one aim was to stop Shephard and, I suspected, Dreyfuss Corp in general, from all their genetic engineering programmes.

Disturbed by what she had described, and as an unusual and particularly intriguing brain not overly keen on being diced, I had decided some months back that we had interests in common. I was to protect her from the Corporation's pets – she was to prevent me from becoming one.

We entered the house. The front door opened straight into the living room, which was separated from the kitchen by a partition wall. Against this stood a desk upon which sat a terminal and an impressive array of paraphernalia: floppy, micro and wafer drives, mouse, telex unit and telephone coupling. Jude plugged in the relevant units and sat at the keyboard. She tapped instructions on-screen.

'You hooked up?' I asked.

The screen flickered. 'Yes,' she confirmed at last. 'How long do we have here?'

'With a safety margin, ten minutes. How long will it take?'

'An hour at the outside.'

I sighed.

'Go make some coffee. This place is probably stocked for his arrival.'

I went into the kitchen, drew down the blind and turned the light on. I searched the cupboards, brimful of packaged food, for instant. It was there. The coffee made, I brought two cups through into the living room, set one on the desk beside Jude and took the other across to the sofa near the stairs.

'Shephard believes in creature comforts, doesn't he? Electricity connected, coffee in the cupboards.'

'Shut up, I have to think.'

I sat down and sipped at my drink. It was hot, rich. I set the cup down, lay back on the couch and tried to relax.

My thoughts drifted back over the last twenty-four hours. What I found there did not reassure me. What had my latest victims on the motorway been paid to do? To kidnap me and kill Jude, presumably – but why had a Dreyfuss dog been present? They knew damn well I could snatch the leash of a Dreyfuss dog.

Jude turned to me. 'I'm in.'

'How long?'

'Still about an hour. Forty minutes if I'm quick.'

'Try to be.'

I estimated it would take about ten minutes after the first warning of a break-in for the house to be surrounded. 'Might as well have a look round. D'you mind?' I asked.

'It would give me some peace.'

I went upstairs. There were only three rooms. Ahead a bathroom/WC; to my left, a single bedroom. It was tiny, spartan. There were empty bookshelves, a cupboard standing open.

Opposite the bathroom there was a double bedroom, likewise empty.

I heard Jude laugh. I went to the top of the stairs and leaned over the bannister. 'What is it?'

'Short cut. Lazy sod's replaced an entire safe-routine with a signature punch.'

'Why?'

'Ease of access. Would you spend half an hour breaking into your own database?'

I descended the stairs. 'That only applies to this terminal, do you think?'

'It isn't a terminal. It's a slave to the mainframe. That's the bad news. It means the central monad can recognise at an instant when this keyboard is in use.'

'So it can act as an alarm when Shephard's out.'

Jude reached over to the coupler. 'Dumping will take thirty seconds. Then it's over.'

'Hurry,' I warned needlessly.

There was a scratching at the door. I started, turned.

'Relax,' Jude said, as she plugged the phone handset into the coupler and punched in Henry's number. 'It's been going on since you went upstairs.'

Another scratch.

'It's probably a cat.'

Another scratch.

'I'll take a look,' I said, made for the door and stopped short. Something was wrong.

'Damn thing won't answer,' Jude said.

'What thing?'

'Henry's phone.'

'Hurry up.'

She coded in three times, then pulled the handset from the machine and put it to her ear.

The scratching on the door became persistent.

Jude tapped the receiver, listened again.

Something thumped the door.

'He's not connected,' she said, her voice hollow.

'What do you mean?'

'Shephard's not on the bloody phone. He's not connected yet,' she said desperately.

I went over to her, snatched the handset. Nothing.

'I'll dump it on disk,' she said. 'We'll have to make it to Henry's tonight.'

She sat down at the desk, reached into a black file box and drew out a disk at random. She fumbled it into the drive and started tapping. The door rattled on its hinges. Calmly, I said, 'If that's a cat, it's being swung.'

'Then what is it?'

'I didn't know. I couldn't figure it. Someone trying to break in?'

The disk whined.

'Come on.'

'Let it finish.'



SIMON D INGS recently moved from London to Bradford, where he writes full time. He has sold stories to *Interzone* and to the anthology *Other Edens III*. A science fiction novel, *The Barthes Engine*, is doing the rounds. *Dreyfuss Dogs* is based upon certain stage events he observed one night in the London Docklands.

"To be fair, I was something they could never have predicted"

The door shuddered on its frame.

I seized her hand, pulled her from her chair.

'No.' She broke from my grip and rushed back to the desk. I stood by the bannister. Behind me I could hear matchwood snap.

'For Christ's sake . . .'

Jude ran to me, the door exploded and, as we scrambled up the stairs, I glimpsed black fur.

We got into the double bedroom, pushed a dressing table in front of the door and leaned up against it. We heard the clattering of plastic, the implosion of a vacuum tube. We used the respite to prop one of the beds up against the door as well.

'They'll be here in a second,' I said.

'Then do it. Do it. Go under.'

A pause. 'I can't.'

There was no scent to the beast downstairs, none at all. There had been nothing I could recognise before as it scratched the door. Nothing I could get hold of now I knew what it was. Nothing.

'Try.'

We leaned back against the underside of the upturned bed, adding our meagre weight to the furniture blockade. I figured the dog's maximum run-up to the door (it got into the bathroom and backed up against the bathtub) was about eight feet. Not much to overcome the inertia of a two hundred and thirty pound body. Yes, we were safe here. Until the others came.

Something hammered the stairs, then came the sound of claws on bathroom tile. The first thud against the door was too strong for comfort. I tried to go under, was encouraged by the slightest whiff of fur. But it was not enough to sustain me. I would have to wait.

Jude reached to me, waved a microdisk in front of my face. 'This is what I ran back for,' she said. 'We've done it. Now get us out of here.'

I fell forward into her lap and the door shuddered under a second blow. The scent was stronger. A savoury taste bloomed in my mouth. 'I can do it,' I whispered to her, to myself. 'I can do it.' Another blow to the door.

A bloody darkness descended. I condensed along pathways of canine limbs, genitals and gut.

A turquoise wash of thought banished darkness, then planed out to a flat field above which hung red gore-clouds pulsing out a complex peristaltic rhythm. From them was suspended a giant black hook.

I scampered across blue feathers, crouched and leapt.

The hook rose and turned on its chain. I had sprung. I had launched. There was no way to abort the flight. I watched helpless as the spike angled towards me. I extended my forepaws to fend off the spike and missed miserably. Another eight inches brought the rusted metal to prick beneath the fur of my chest. Then, inch by inch, I felt its length penetrate my flesh, touch heart, pinch lung, and draw me up, high up and helpless into the big red sky.

The next I knew, it was day. We were by the Thames. A narrow strip of derelict warehousing separated us from the river. All this I perceived in the space of an eyeblink, as if by some foreign instinct.

I looked down at Jude. Without thinking, I asked, 'Are you all right?'

She looked up, surprised. She nodded. 'You?' she echoed, urgently.

'Yes, but . . . ' I shrugged. The gesture felt false somehow, half-forgotten. 'Something went wrong. I didn't snatch the leash.'

We were walking. Were we being followed? Probably. Strange, that it didn't frighten me. I was running in neutral, as if incapable of emotion, puzzlement. Was I in shock?

'Don't you remember? The dog collapsed. Or

come'd. So you must have snatched it somehow, done something to it.' She looked up at me.

I tried to smile in response but I couldn't make the muscles work. 'Then what?' I asked.

'Then . . . I had to wake you up. You seemed . . . distant. Are you okay now? Do you remember anything?'

'How long have we been walking?'

'Four hours.'

'I don't remember anything. How did you get me here?'

'You made all the right moves.'

I shivered, then shook my head. Another gesture strangely alien to me.

'You were dazed, didn't say anything. Nothing at all till now.'

'What was there to say?' The words didn't make sense in my mouth.

'What?'

'Doesn't matter. Just being stupid.' Slow and stupid, I thought. 'How long did it take us to get out of there?'

'About three minutes.'

'After the dog collapsed.'

'After I found the dog.'

'How long did you wait before you went out the room?'

'About a minute, I guess. You'd gone under and I couldn't hear the dog. I thought it was safe, that you'd leashed it.'

'But you knew I hadn't taken it downstairs.'

'I thought maybe you were disoriented. I went out to help you.'

'So,' I said, and yawned. I couldn't help it. 'From the dog's scratching on the door to us leaving there was a gap of about . . . twelve minutes. At the inside.'

'Yes. About that.'

'Too long,' I said, my tone hollow and curiously emotionless. 'How could they be twelve minutes behind one of their own dogs?'

'It might have been sent as soon as they found the keyboard in use.'

'Sent on ahead? To warn us?'

'To pin us down; to destroy the keyboard and coupler.'

'But they knew I could take out the dog.'

We fell silent at that, both of us. The same thoughts ran through our heads. The fact was, for the first time since I'd mastered leash-snatching, I couldn't take it out – not that particular dog. Not properly. I hardly even smelt it. Did they know I would have that difficulty? Was it designed to resist me?

After all, I was important – a maverick, an anomaly the Corporation could not ignore. Say the dog had been made special. How could they have prepared it? They knew nothing about me; only that I could snatch leashes. They didn't know how . . .

I remembered the motorway. A test, perhaps? Why else, when they knew I could snatch dogs, would they have sent a dog after us? They could in this way have learnt about me on the run – incited me into demonstrating my skill.

'It doesn't matter,' a voice, not mine, proclaimed.

'What?' Jude squeezed my hand.

'I love you.'

Who was that in my mouth?

'Harry,' she said, and laughed. 'This isn't the time . . .'

'Shut up. Let me kiss you.'

Without my willing it, my legs halted, my hands reached out to her shoulders and turned her to me. My head lowered, my gaze took in her face.

'Let me kiss you.'

She smiled and lifted her head. My jaw dropped and the bare flesh of her neck rose up to meet me.

The truth came clear. I made to scream, but blood filled my mouth. I struggled to break free, but I was tangled in the leash, and could not move.

"Then, inch by inch, I felt its length penetrate my flesh, touch heart, pinch lung and draw me up, high up and helpless into the big red sky"



THE IMMIRROR

By Deena J Carvell

"Where was she? With that damned mirror?"

The mirror had hung in my grandmother's hallway for years. It had been part of my boyhood, in the same way my mother's kitchen table with its knife marks, and my father's six foot tall beech hedge that he so proudly trimmed had been. I could recall the dark oak frame, about four foot by three, with its heavy Jacobean carving, the craftsman's elaborate scrolls at the base and head, the large smooth ball of contrasting wood set into the centre top. That ball had fascinated me as a child. It had seemed to change colour with the weather. I remember grandmother saying she could tell when it would rain by that mirror, it reflected the elements in some mystic way I never understood. Perhaps some manner of expansion made the colour change, I don't know; but it gleamed now, a deep black oak, as my wife brandished the newly polished article before my sleep-filled vision at a ridiculous hour in the morning.

'Have you stained it?' I asked, surprised at the depth of its blackness.

'No.' She shook her head proudly. 'That's the colour it came up when I stripped off the old varnish. I just polished it, it's so shiny anyway it doesn't need varnish.'

'Won't it warp or something?'

'I don't think so. The wood's solid, there are no cracks or anything, and it's dry in the hall.'

'The hall?' Somehow, the fact that she was going to hang it there struck me as more than coincidence.

'Yes. That's the best possible place for it. It belongs in the hall.' She was so certain. I stared at her.

'What's the matter?'

'Nothing. It's just that my grandmother used to hang it in the hall.'

'Did she? Then it's carrying on the tradition, isn't it.' She beamed again. 'Do you like it?'

'I think it's lovely,' I lied. 'You've done a great job on it. Are you coming to bed now?'

She nodded; somewhat reluctantly, I thought.

'In a minute, I just want to take it downstairs.'

'Can't it wait till...'

'Won't be long.' She was gone swiftly, prepared to hear no argument.

I wasn't completely happy. I didn't know why. I had no specific reasons, there was just something I didn't like about that mirror. It wasn't that it was old-fashioned and ugly; I'd always thought that. But Mo loved that heavy black furniture, the house was full of it and, strangely, once she had

positioned it carefully, added drapes and cushions, plants and ornaments, it always looked great. I expected the same would apply to the mirror; she would make it work. No, it was an insubstantial thing, a hint of concern that I couldn't place. Nevertheless, I was tired, so I turned over and quickly fell asleep.

I didn't hear her come to bed and she didn't wake me when she rose early the next morning. I knew she'd been there because the sheets were ruffled and the quilt turned back her side, her night-dress lay across the pillow. I tried to snooze but my head was full of questions. Where was she?

With that damned mirror?

How could she get up without waking me, I wasn't that deep a sleeper? Why the devil did she need to get up at...? For God's sake, it was only six o'clock in the morning! There was no such time in my calendar, not on a Saturday anyway.

Finding I couldn't sleep, I dragged on some casual clothes, ran my fingers through my hair and wandered out to the bathroom, pausing to call down the stairs on the way. There was no answer, but I could see the mirror on the end wall, next to the door and facing up the stairs. It glinted darkly in the early light from the coloured glass panel in the front door, reflecting the stairs and the distant crack of light from the kitchen door at the end of the passage. The shadows seemed somehow ominous to me; a bit creepy. I completed my trip to the bathroom, determined not to stare too long. I didn't take much notice of the feeling, but I was conscious of a certain d@ej@a vu when I looked into that mirror. Knowing full well that on this occasion I had indeed been there before, many times as a child and since, I shook the feeling away.

The mirror in the bathroom reflected only my haggard and sallow complexion; the bags under my eyes and the distant expression of being awakened from a none too refreshing sleep. Unaccountably, a part of my mind blamed Mo and the mirror; mainly the mirror. I had quite enough to worry about without that. I hadn't told Mo, but the company I had worked for since I left school at the age of seventeen, the company I'd been loyal to, hung on to, hoping everything would turn out right in the end, was threatening to make me redundant. Fifteen years! What did they want — blood?

I scraped the razor angrily across my chin in a gesture of defiance, and cut myself. Blotting the wound with a corner of tissue, I cursed the company aloud.

'You all right, Pete?'

My nerves leapt at the sound of Mo's voice and I dropped the razor in the sink. Angrily, I left it there. 'For God's sake, woman! You made me jump!'

I flung open the bathroom door to find Mo looking scared.

'I didn't...'

'No, it's okay. I'm sorry. I didn't sleep too well last night.'

I apologised quickly, hoping she wouldn't sulk.

'No, you didn't,' she said instead. 'You kept rolling about and talking in your sleep. You woke me up, so I went to make a drink.'

'Is there a spare one?' I asked, in need of a strong mug of tea above all else. My legs felt a bit shaky, I wanted to sit down and relax. I was overwrought.

'Sure. In the pot. You coming down?'

She tried a smile, and was obviously relieved when I returned it. I kissed her by way of an apology.

"I wasn't too drunk to notice the way the shadows ran for the shelter of the walls and doorways"

'Yes. I need a drink, I'm gasping.'
'Did you see the mirror?' Mo asked me when we were seated at the kitchen table. She was pouring milk over her cornflakes. She passed me the box.
'Um,' I nodded through a mouthful of hot tea.' It looks good.'
'You really think so?'
'Yeh. It fits in well there.'
'Well, you chose the place.'
'Did I?'
'You know you did. You put the hook in for me while I was out.'
'Did I? When?'
'Pete!'

She looked aggravated by my obtuseness, but I simply couldn't remember banging in any hooks, making any holes for hooks, or even thinking that I might.

'I don't remember doing that,' I said.
'Well, you must have done. Who else could do it? There wasn't a hook there earlier this week and there is now. I meant to thank you before but I forgot. I'm sorry.'
'Cheers!'

'I didn't mean to forget, I was busy,' she countered quickly, looking hurt.

'No, I didn't mean to be sarcastic. I really don't recall knocking in any hooks. I would have had to use a drill; those walls are built of cast iron. You remember the trouble I had with that picture you wanted in the hall? It's not the hook from that is it?'
'No!' she shouted. 'Pete, don't tease me. You know you put the hook in for me.'

I was confused. Was I going mad, or had the hook mysteriously appeared while we slept? I told myself not to be so damned stupid, and took a deep breath. There was such deep consternation on Mo's face that I made a decision.

'Okay, I'm sorry. Yes, I put the hook in. Is it okay?'

She smiled, relieved.

'Yes, it's great. Thanks.'

'Okay, since I'm up, I may as well do something. I'll be down the garden if you want me.'

She nodded, smiling. Kissing the top of my head, she left the kitchen before me and I saw her moving towards the hall where she stood and combed her hair in front of grandmother's mirror.

I potted with my geraniums and fuchsias for a couple of hours, generally tidying, cleaning, sorting out. I watered the greenhouse, picked a few ripe tomatoes and courgettes, cut a cauliflower and gradually made my way back to the house. Opening the kitchen door, I heard voices. I dropped the produce into the sink and wandered out to the hall to see who was making all the noise.

Mo's friend Carol and her two children were just piling into their car outside and Mo was waving them goodbye from the step.

I was glad she hadn't fetched me back to say hello, those kids were the most ill-mannered, badly behaved, spoiled brats I'd ever had the misfortune to encounter. I generally tried to keep well out of the way when they were around, or I might be sorely tried not to deposit them down the waste-disposal.

'Good timing!' Mo congratulated me as she shut the door.

'More by luck than by judgment, I didn't hear them arrive.'

'Brought any courgettes?' she asked, changing the subject.

'In the sink.'

I noticed the mirror lying against the door jamb leading into the lounge. It was covered in three-year-old's handprints, eighteen-month-old's dribble and gooey, sweetie blobs like pink sugar.

'Yuck!'

'What?'

I pointed out the devastation.

'I let the kids play with it, it kept them quiet.'

'Never! I didn't believe it possible to keep those kids quiet.'

'Well, they made a good old mess anyway. I'll clean it later. Could you hang it back for me, Pete?'

I lifted the mirror back onto its hook, and adjusted it carefully. The kids had made a lovely mess of the glass, but it still reflected the stairs and hallway dimly behind the stains. I straightened my hair with my fingers, trying to see only my reflection. Somehow I didn't want to see what was behind me. I went back to help Mo with the lunch.

After we had eaten, I sat down to watch some sport on the TV while Mo cleared away the dishes. When the doorbell rang, Mo answered it. She spoke quietly to the visitor, I heard her say 'No thank you' and close the door, then she gave a little cry that made me look up.

'You've cleaned the mirror, Pete. Thanks.' She was delighted.

'Oh. That's okay,' I said without thinking. Tessa Sanderson was just making the most magnificent throw and I was soaring through the air with the javelin, urging it onwards to even greater distance, when Mo's words registered. She wasn't looking at me by then. She was pleased with my reply, mildly chuffed that I'd turned out to be so amazingly domesticated, I stared out of the kitchen towards the mirror that shone quite plainly at the far end of the hall.

I hadn't cleaned it.

I got up and made my way rather slowly towards it, my nerves twitching in anticipation. Maybe it was just the light shining on the glass; maybe she'd been mistaken.

I approached it first from the side, then from the stairs. It was spotless, shining — clean. There wasn't a sticky finger print anywhere to be seen. I swallowed. Mo was having me on now. It was a joke. It had to be a joke. I reached out and touched the mirror softly on the bottom corner. My print stayed on the glass. I was tempted to leave it there, go back later, check it was still in place.

I ran upstairs to the bathroom, doused my face with cold water, dried it with a towel, gingerly opened the door and approached the mirror again. The stairs seemed miles from the thing that twinkled at their foot, the eye that saw everything. Nothing that had ever happened in front of that mirror had failed to be reflected by it. What if...? I shook my head. It was only a mirror. It couldn't record or think.

I peered at the bottom corner, and there was my fingerprint as plain as day. I grinned, then laughed. It was madness; the pressures of work were finally getting to me. Again I put it out of my mind.

We were out that evening, attending a dinner party at friends'.

Mo wore a glorious, red satin dress. Derek, my colleague, whose party it was, couldn't keep his hands off her. His wife, and mine, kept giggling. I had too much wine with dinner and too many shorts afterwards. The liquor made me numb, less nervous. What the devil was I afraid of? We got a taxi home, when Mo decided I was too drunk to drive.

But when I turned the key in the front door and clicked on the hall light I wasn't too drunk to notice the way the shadows ran for the shelter of the walls and doorways; or too inebriated to miss the fleeting skipping of arms and legs towards the stairs — towards the mirror.

I ran for the bottom of the stairs and stared into its oh-so dark depths, and I swear I saw the back view of two small children skipping away into the blackness, holding hands. A small girl with pigtailed and a kind of floaty fairy-like frock with a satin Victorian-style cummerbund, and a slightly smaller boy in imitation sailor blue, little knee length socks and buckled shoes.

I spun round, expecting to see them half way up the stairs, but the landing was dark — the stairs empty.

I turned around to find Mo gazing at me in shocked disbelief.

'What on earth's wrong?' she asked, her voice trembling, partly worried, partly angry. She knew I was drunk; but she thought I was more drunk than I actually was. She probably also thought I was mad.

'Nothing. It's all right,' I said quickly. '... I cut myself shaving this morning. I just picked the scab. I wondered if it was bleeding.'

She didn't believe me, I could see that she didn't. She tutted loudly and stormed off into the kitchen. I let her go alone, telling myself that I wasn't afraid to remain in the hallway, but I turned on the landing light just in case.

I sat reading far into the night. I wasn't tired and I knew I wouldn't sleep. Mo hadn't spoken to me since we got in. I knew she was disgusted by my excess of alcohol; I thought she was over-doing the enraged housewife bit, but then she hadn't had much to say to me at all for a while. In retrospect, we had probably never talked so little since the earliest days of my chatting her up when I got all tongue-tied and stupid. We had never been short of something to say since then, had always been deeply engrossed in each other to the exclusion of almost anyone or anything else. That had altered remarkably over the past week, since the evening I found her searching for granny's mirror.

Somewhere in the mists of my childhood there was a story. It bothered me, but it wouldn't come; it was stuck in my memory, blanketed by years and events. There was something very strange about that mirror. I'd known that when the old lady gave it to Mo just after our wedding; I'd known it when she took it out of the wardrobe and started to restore it, and I'd known it when she proudly brought it into the bedroom at three o'clock in the morning to show me. I'd known fully then that dear, sweet, dizzy Maureen, my lovely dumb wife, was totally incapable of doing anything practical. She couldn't cook, she couldn't sew, she couldn't change a light bulb. She was useless at anything remotely to do with arts and crafts of any kind. Yet she had taken a worn, dirty old frame, (it had a deep crack running down its left side as I recalled), stripped and polished it, restored it to a shine that was unnatural without the use of varnishes — I hadn't believed that at the time — re-silvered the mirror where the corners had turned grey and cracked with age, straightened the frame where it had warped, mounted the glass back onto the wood, even polished that strange wooden ball that no one could ever state the name of. Brought from abroad, granny said, during the Great War, or was it the Boer War? The glass itself was even older

than that.

The wooden ball caught the light in a peculiarly twinkling manner not unlike a gem-stone. There were times, when my grandmother was alive, that it would gleam like silver. She would polish it every day; it had become a habit. Had I noticed Mo doing the same thing?

'Are you coming to bed, Peter?'

She caught me off guard again. Boy, my nerves were getting bad!

'I'm on my way.'

She hovered in the doorway; I thought she looked pale, concerned. When I enquired, however, she shrugged and said nothing.

'Is everything all right Mo?' I slipped an arm round her shoulders as I switched off the study light and closed the door.

'Why shouldn't it be?'

'I just thought you looked upset, that's all.'

'Well, you shouldn't drink so much. You made a right fool of yourself.'

'When?' I reacted snappishly; angry that she should condemn what was merely a little overindulgence. I didn't think I'd looked a fool.

'Tonight, when we got back. Leaping about like an idiot. Anyone would think you'd been hallucinating or something.'

I laughed. I had to. It all seemed so absolutely ludicrous.

'What's so funny?'

'You are. Can't a man enjoy himself once in a while? You never used to take on like this every time I had one too many. I wasn't that drunk or I'd still be drunk now.'

'Aren't you?'

'No, I'm not!' I pushed away from her, angry. 'I'm not drunk, and I would be grateful if you wouldn't nag constantly about one incident which means nothing at all.'

'I'm not nagging...'

'Yes you are.'

Her face was set, she was staring furiously at the stair wall, refusing to meet my gaze.

'You've done nothing else lately. What's the matter, are you getting old or something? Perhaps it's me; perhaps you've got a boyfriend. Have you?'

She ran up the stairs ahead of me, her lip quivering. When I reached the bedroom door, I found it locked.

'Mo, let me in, I didn't mean that. I'm sorry.'

I was sorry. I hammered on the door for a while, demanding entry to my own bedroom. She neither assented to my request nor spoke to me again.

I finally admitted defeat, shrugged and turned to go to the spare room. As I passed the top of the stairs a chill swept through me, a profound icy wave that started at my feet and coursed right through my body. I shuddered. Inexplicably, I turned, glowering down at the mirror that stared with its empty eyes right back at me. I dared it to taunt me, but taunt me it did. It gleamed brighter, taking in the scene: my house, my stairs, the hall, me standing at the top of the stairs — at least, my feet and legs. I knew in my heart that it could see all of me, and that it was watching me. The shudder returned, stronger. Silently I promised to get rid of the thing the next day and turned with a mouthed curse, catching out of the corner of my eye a flash of white reflected in the glass. When I looked again, it was gone.

Again, sleep wouldn't come. I woke at least five times before I lost count. I was shivery, shaking as if I was catching a particularly virulent form of flu;



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"As I passed the top of the stairs a chill swept through me" "I was disturbed beyond mere concern. I was scared"

my hands were clammy, my head thudded. I was disturbed beyond mere concern. I was scared.

The desire to go out onto the landing crept silently into my mind. A desire to stand quietly and watch, so quietly that the thing did not perceive my presence. Peer through the bannisters so I could see. What would happen in the darkness of my midnight shrouded hallway? All the passing people, scores of people, living, crying, laughing, fighting —

dying — before the mirror's eyes, all held in the glass: a constant reminder. How many tragedies had it seen? How many had it perpetrated?

I thought how happy my relationship with Mo had been until just last week; how suddenly she no longer spoke to me in the same way; how the tenderness had gone out of her look, her touch, how moody and withdrawn she had become. I wanted to believe it was another man, I could cope with that — but a mirror? I was sure it was the mirror; it had all started the day she took the mirror out of the wardrobe.

I switched on all the available lights when I went downstairs to the study to phone my mother. I closed the door firmly in the face of the mirror that reflected the startling light angrily into my tired eyes. I swore under my breath. My thoughts were becoming more and more fanciful but I was scared and I had to know.

"Fragments of glass stung my face and hands, air rushed past"

My mother was somewhat confused by my questions about the family heirloom, and not a little annoyed at being disturbed at five in the morning, but her answer stunned me.

'I don't want to sound like a silly, old woman, Peter, but I would advise you to take it down to the tip and make sure you drop it on something solid.'

'I think you'd better go on,' I said. She must have heard my voice tremble, because she asked if I was all right. I wasn't at all sure.

'I was against you having that mirror in the first place,' my mother told me. 'Your father would never have it in the house, he always felt uncomfortable anywhere near it, so my mother kept it for you instead of passing it on to me. It's very old now, it's been in the family for as long as anyone can remember. My grandmother had it in her hallway, and her mother before her. It's a girl's thing. It was never given to the men, but when I had no daughters and your cousin Sandra died, my mother passed it on to Maureen.'

'What's wrong with it then?' I asked, feeling somehow that I had no right to be asking any such question.

'It has always seemed to bring ill luck to the men of the family.'

'Oh come on!' I was prepared to be flippant at this stage.

'Peter, don't scoff!'

She meant it.

'Bad things happened with that mirror in the old days; people became ill; some died.'

'People become ill and die anyway, mum. You can't blame an inanimate object for that.'

'Peter, you rang me because you were worried. If you're not going to listen, I might as well go back to bed.'

She was right of course: I was worried.

'The family story is that it was made about three or four hundred years ago. Tales get out of all proportion in the telling, but from the style and quality, it seems likely to be true. The glass has that sort of burnished quality of old mirrors.'

'Women over the generations have kept it, pol-

ished it and looked after it. It never seemed to age; while the men of the family have at different times seen it warp and crack and the glass shatter for no apparent reason. An uncle of mine once swore he found it lying in many pieces one morning, but it was whole again when he fetched my mother to clean up the mess. The visions of its destruction have always seemed to portend disaster. The mirror would become whole again, even clean itself within twenty-four hours. The night after my uncle saw it smashed, he died suddenly in his sleep. He wasn't ill and he wasn't old. My mother always said she didn't believe in things like that, it was all nonsense. She never would take it down, yet I stood and watched my uncle's funeral cortège leave the house in that mirror — ten days after the funeral.'

'It cleaned itself?'

I ignored her last sentence; I couldn't cope with that.

'It certainly seemed to, it always stayed much the same way over the years, without anyone having much to do with it.'

I went cold.

'Sometimes, when people have looked into it, usually the men, they saw not their own face, but someone else's, or someone standing behind them in the mirror, but there was no one there when they turned round.'

My heart thumped in my chest. It couldn't be true. The cold feeling had turned to a hot flush. Now I was scared. Really scared.

'Who made it then?' I asked. I needed to hear my own voice, the room was so silent.

'The story is that it belonged to a convent...'

'A what?'

'A convent. Peter, are you all right?'

It was as if an icy hand had grabbed my heart. I just didn't believe it, I wasn't capable of believing so much.

'Fine. It's just that...'

'What? For goodness sake, Peter — tell me!'

'I passed the top of the stairs last night. You can see the mirror from there.'

Mum made a sort of 'Um' sound that suggested she understood.

'Out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw someone standing at the bottom of the stairs looking into the mirror.'

'Not looking at you?'

'No, why?'

'It doesn't matter. Who did you see?'

'I thought it was... I might have been mistaken, the lights shine in from the street and sometimes you get bright shadows on the stairs.'

'What?'

She sounded impatient. I had never known my mother to be impatient.

'A nun, I thought I saw a nun.'

'Peter, is Maureen in bed...?'

'It's all right; I left all the lights on and it'll be dawn soon, I think I'll...'

The lights didn't go out as they would in a power cut, instantly, leaving me blinking and blind, they faded with a leisurely grace, so slowly that I wasn't aware of their absence until my hip collided with the desk top as I fiddled with the phone connection. My mother's voice had faded away also and now the phone was dead.

I made it to the top of the stairs before the light died completely. Finding our bedroom door unlocked, I raced in, calling her name. Mo wasn't in bed. I guess she'd got up to use the bathroom, but I

hadn't passed her on the landing, and surely she would call out to me if the lights went out, she hated the dark. The tingling apprehension I felt when I crossed the landing earlier began to return, driving closer this time to panic, welling up within me like a volcano, and something I wasn't sure I could control much longer.

The tightening edge of darkness from the stairs actually pushed the barrier of night inwards to me, the landing was darker than the bedroom, the stairs blacker still, the mirror... I dared not think of the mirror. The chill struck me, a chill I recognised, it made the darkness so much more alive; menacing. I was conscious of a branch blowing outside, a gusting wind rapping it against its neighbour. I couldn't hear rain, nor could I see any light from the street lamp. And, when the switch on the landing clicked down uselessly, I froze.

There was a torch in the third drawer of the dining room cabinet, I remembered, as I took a step onto the landing. I was trying to keep the torch foremost in my mind when the feeling hit me. Like a blanket thrown over the head of a captive; darkness augmenting fear. I groped for the wall, knowing the stairs were ahead of me, feeling my way, steadying my heart, toes stretching for the first step. The gap between each stair grew, each carefully placed foot landed heavier than the last.

The gleam in the mirror drew my attention to the hallway; levelling my perspective, telling me I was almost at ground level. The tingling of morbid expectation increased as I found the final step and stood before the mirror.

Its vista was an intense blackness, yet a single light flickered somewhere deep, getting brighter, clearer — outside the glass.

I involuntarily stepped backwards, tripping over the riser, stumbling up the next two, my eyes never leaving the glowing candle she held in her grasp. The hand and the arm held the flame distinct from the long fingers, the nails were short, and night diffused their peachy varnish to a flat grey; her night-dresses rustled against her legs as she walked. My nerve endings leapt to meet her; my subconscious whispered to my body to stay right where it was. I felt my fingers curl around the bannister, the muscles in my chest contract, my head tighten almost to pain. I held my breath.

The woman's face was unrecognisable in the night, her features hazy. I knew it wasn't Mo, yet somehow she seemed familiar. She moved steadily towards the stairs, the candle held before her, her grip firm, her bearing upright, confident; not the unsteady and tentative grip of someone unused to walking with lighted candles.

Then I saw the wimple framing her face and my heart missed a beat. I took one more step backwards, again stumbling, sitting down hard on the step behind me, grazing my back on rough carpet. The nun passed below me; she didn't look up but she could see me in the glass. I saw her eyes glint eerily. I couldn't run, or move away, my limbs were paralysed.

She turned the corner at the bottom of the stairs, squarely, never deviating from the course and, as I watched, she walked bodily into the mirror and drifted into the distance and darkness beyond.

I remained sitting on the fourth stair, gazing into the glass for minutes until the fear subsided enough to allow me to stand. My legs felt weak, my head dizzy; a band of sickness gushed over my senses, then ebbed away as quickly. I needed the support of the bannister when finally I rose; one

thought in my mind overwhelmed me: where was my wife?

Somehow, I found the energy to leap down the remaining few steps and along the hall. I threw open the dining room door, groped for the cabinet and found the torch inside.

Thankfully, I clicked on the light. Its beam lit familiar objects but in relief, the shadows dense like skulking intruders in the corners. Not waiting for my eyes to confuse me, I ran towards the kitchen, then the lounge, throwing open doors and knocking over ornaments; smashing into furniture, calling her name. There was no sign of Mo, it was as if she had disappeared into thin air.

On the way upstairs, I checked the front door. It was locked and bolted. She couldn't have left the house that way; why would she leave the house at all? Especially without saying anything to me. On a whim, I ran back and checked the back door. That, too, was securely locked from the inside. I mounted the stairs again, checking all the rooms as I moved along the landing but finding them all empty.

The bathroom door was stuck and I rammed it open with my shoulder, dread welling in my mind. Again, there was nothing and no one inside. The room was full of steam, the shower was still running. Coughing and sweating, I leant over to turn off the water, scalding my arm, slipping in the damp patch beneath the shower tray where two wet imprints declared that someone had stepped out of the shower. I noticed the wetness leading towards the landing door; further panic rose in my heart when I saw that the footprints led down the stairs and stopped — in front of the mirror.

I shone with a dull luminescence, laughing at me, its glowering evil mocked my efforts. Breathing hard, again I stood before it, trying to see beyond its depths, anger and fear clogging my senses. Seized with a rage I could barely control I pounded the glass with my fists, screaming my wife's name, demanding her return, sure that the glass was the cause of her disappearance. Throwing the front door open to the elements and leaving it banging, I ran to the garage and snatched up a lump hammer. Running back to the house, I raised the hammer above my head and swung it, malice adding weight to the blow.

Then the world slowed; the next few seconds hovered around me like dust in a storm, fragments of glass stung my face and hands, air rushed past, and in that air, the cries and whispers of a hundred hurt and frightened ancestors, their voices pleading. The laughing, mocking, various drifting echoes of their tenuous links with life released as one. As the pieces settled and I unfolded my arms from across my eyes, I saw a gathering of shards, a roughly hexagonal section of glass placed together as if by some magic, and within that glass, a picture.

The nun turned slowly to meet me, her white habit dragging heavily, hindering her movements. Virginal clothes hid her body, her sins, beneath their perpetual declaration of confession. All worldly and feminine tokens brutally denied.

My eyes met hers deeply, a lifetime of knowledge flickered in their depths, a knowledge slowly absorbed by the immortal blackness. The seconds ticked by almost audibly as my thoughts swept out towards hers, joining, knowing: my heart wept in the realisation. The nun smiled just once, briefly, then turned. My wife walked away, she never looked back.

"The tightening edge of darkness from the stairs pushed the barrier of night inwards towards me"

TAR

BY CLIFF WALLACE

"The floor was carpeted with sedimentary layers of ash and phlegm"

Even the air smelt different; a heady concoction of rotting vegetation, stagnant, silted water and stale tobacco. There was no hint of a moon that night as Greg Wrapson drove onto the wharf. Even his car was unlit, such was the nature of his business here. The engine coughed at the rank air and died fitfully. For a moment Greg just sat listening to the sounds of the place with the sweat running in rivulets from his brow. There was the sound of the black water lapping against the shingle bank on the far side of the river, the groans of the rusting Thames barges cooling down after a long day in the hot July sun. But behind it all were the incessant coughs and wheezes that issued from the vast derelict warehouse he was here to visit. The place men called 'Cancer Corner'.

Greg wiped the sweat away with his sleeve and took a shot from the hip flask his girlfriend had given him for his twenty-first. The whisky burned, but his fingers were still trembling long after he'd drained the last precious drop from the flask. He looked at his watch. The liquid figures glowed hotly in the darkness. 1.05. He was late, and he couldn't afford to be. Not tonight.

The boot sprang open and he lifted the two cardboard cartons out and set them down on the parched concrete. It became painfully obvious to him then that, for the first time in three years, he had not delivered. He started to shake again, uncontrollably now. His stomach cramped, he felt

nauseous; every muscle ached. He knew what this was: it was fear. And he'd felt it before, nearly two years ago now.

He wasn't living with Jackie then. But they'd still known exactly where to find her. The previous night he had told them he wanted nothing more to do with them — that they must find someone else who could do the job. Then he got the call. At about two a.m. Jackie had rung him and cried hysterically down the phone. By the time he had reached her she'd calmed down enough to show him Bertrand, a giant teddy bear who was her only sleeping partner in those days. The bear had been attacked while she slept beside it. Its eyes had been burnt out and it wore a crumpled cigarette carton around its neck. Three words had been scrawled in black marker pen on the packet. Three words, simple and direct.

WE WANT YOU.

He'd been sick then, because it didn't take much to deduce that the message had been for him. And the threat was obvious. They could get Jackie any time they wanted. It could have been *her* eyes. Her beautiful eyes. Many times since then he'd had the dream; that he would roll over to face her as she slept, and he'd smell scorched flesh, see the yellowy-black blisters across her cheek and brow, the two seared orbs and the pale mush of fluid leaking from them down her cheeks. And everywhere there would be a rancid smell of tobacco smoke while the breeze from the half-opened window swirled ash like summer snow around the room.

Greg buried the image, picked up the two cartons and began to cross the wasteland towards the warehouse. The smell got stronger as he approached and the noise increased. The sound always set his teeth on edge, despite the fact that he had made well over a hundred visits. No one ever came here, unless they intended to stay. Nothing could prepare an outsider for what he would find within these rotting Victorian walls. No light came from the building despite the large numbers of lamps which burned on all three levels.

He pushed the door open. It groaned on rusty hinges. A wall of blue-white smoke enveloped him. He stepped inside. The coughs and wheezes were almost deafening now, lending the building a bronchial ambience. The cloying smoke thinned and thickened, clutched at his clothes and hair, polluting them with its foul odour. The floor was carpeted with sedimentary layers of ash and phlegm. It glistened like muckilage in the shifting light. A man could easily slip upon the slick floor and become fossilised within that repulsive strata. Greg trod carefully. Soot papered the walls. Streamers of mucus patterned it. The design was in constant motion, ever shifting, forever being augmented; it hung in vast shimmering curtains from the decaying archways.

From time to time he caught glimpses of the inhabitants of this foul place, men and women whose frames were wasted beyond recognition. Soot permeated every hollow of their bodies, lay on the ridges of their ribs, coloured their hair. They appeared undernourished, some were almost skeletal, their eyes having long since lost their lustre. Eye disease was as rife as heart and lung disorders. People died here; their flesh rotted from their bones, ash shrouded them.

Ashes to ashes.

He climbed the stairs to the second level. No one

approached him, but he knew they were waiting behind the shifting blankets of grey smoke. Visibility was down to twelve feet here, but occasionally he saw their shadows, misshapen and grotesque. Mostly he just heard them. Some were barely human now. Some had been born here, and knew no other life. They had probably never seen a human being before — a normal human being, unpolluted. They probably thought he was a freak.

Greg longed for it to be over. He would return home, shower for an hour or so to remove all trace of the foul rancour, and then slip into bed beside Jackie. And then all would be well. Until the next time.

The smoke was hurting his own lungs now, he began to cough fitfully, but he could not distinguish his own hacking, so loud was the general cacophony. He reached the third level. It was here that the highest echelons of this bizarre community lived, the ones that least resembled human beings, those who had grown up in this rarified atmosphere. Everybody smoked here. There was no other occupation. Anyone who could not live without taking tobacco into their lungs came to this place, where they would not be frowned upon. The children here grew with alarming speed. They rapidly became the most revered in the community because they were those most adapted to their environment and their occupation, which was to smoke.

It was Greg's job to secure fresh weekly supplies of tobacco for the building's inhabitants. It was work he had started for money but continued out of fear.

They went by strange names these Children of the Smoke. Names like Ash and Tar. Human titles meant little here. Greg hurried along the narrow corridor that led to Tar's quarters. Occasionally, through the thick air, he would see other creatures in their rooms. One was an emaciated being with a dozen nylon tubes inserted into his gangrenous chest. Each tube was connected to a cigarette suspended on a metal rack before him. In another, a woman (recognisable as such only by the infant clasped to her withered breast) suckled her foetal child not upon milk but on the thick streams of tar that trickled over her distended abdomen. With every step he took the stench, like the sights, grew more unbearable. It was almost like a physical thing, seeping from the soot-blackened walls and yellowed ceiling. The smoke swirled around him, so thick now he could no longer see his plimsoll feet sinking into the ash carpeting. It stung his eyes making tears stream down his sooty face. He held his breath for long periods at a time, trying desperately not to inhale the poisoned air. At last he reached Tar's room. He swung the door open and it closed behind him.

The smoke swirled around the large room, carrying the child's terrible wheezing breaths upon its back. The darkened walls threw the sound back laying echo upon echo until the whole room seemed to throb with the Creature's laboured breathing. Greg could feel years of ash shifting like desert sand across his feet. Several oil lamps burned in the room lending an eerie glow to the folds of smoke hanging from the yellow ceiling.

'Where are you?', Greg asked the smoke.

'Over here by the window,' came the wheezed reply.

It was a strange voice. Strong and wizened yet tinged with sadness.

Greg walked towards the sound, peering

through the murk for a sign of its creator. He stumbled blindly on until at last, when he had crossed the room, he could make out the dark lines of his employer sitting in a chair.

'Have you got it?', the shape asked. There was an undeniable hint of excitement in its simpering voice.

'Yes', Greg replied. A white lie. A half truth.

'Let me see,' it said, beckoning him forward with a stunted arm and long, hooked finger.

Greg took another step forwards. As the Creature spoke, the air darkened. The sight of it always shocked him. Its head was large and bald, the brachiocephalic skull ridged with pulsing blue-grey veins. The eyes were deep set and very small. Pig-like eyes that shone with a smoke reddened light. The nose was large and flat with wattled flaps of grey flesh. And its mouth was pudgy and ill-formed, capable of little more than folding itself around the constant stream of cigarettes it sucked upon. Blackened streams of saliva ran down over the fatty chins in dark rivulets.

Day after day, Tar sat like this, chain-smoking the hours away. He had been an addict even before leaving his mother's womb, but he had known virtually straight away that he was special. There was no other that looked like him

— at least not then. His arms were short and stubby and ended in a long, two-fingered hand. There were malformed hints of digits, fleshy stumps, little more than callouses, but they were not essential for the holding of a cigarette. You only needed two fingers for that. So that is all he had. Because he seldom moved from his room, his torso was fleshy and rounded, his buttocks and back were mottled with bed sores. Beneath his withered breasts were two fleshy tubes, exterior extensions of the lung cavities, which drained the black tar from the lungs and deposited it outside the body. His stomach was awash with glistening rivers of the slick fluid that gurgled and bubbled obscenely from the tubes.

'There are only two,' said Tar in a high, fluting voice. Speaking through the disfigured mouth was difficult and some of the syllables escaped as an eerie, high whistle.

'Yes,' Greg said, averting his eyes from the pupil-less gaze.

'Why?'

Greg coughed, his throat was dry. 'There were problems... with my supplier.'

'I see,' said Tar, not unreasonably.

'But I'll make it up next time, I promise.'

Greg was sweating profusely. His heart was skipping, so much so that for an awful moment he thought he might have a seizure right in front of the Creature. He could see himself falling, tearing at his shirt collar, down amongst the ash, the soot-blackened phlegm and ejected tar.

The Creature could smell the man's fear, its huge nostrils quivered. It leant towards him and nodded the bulbous head very slowly, biting its lip with broken, black teeth.

'Very well.'

Greg stepped back, anxious to be away from this hellish place and the sickening thing.

'Patience,' Tar whistled.

Greg froze.

The Creature picked up one of the cartons and slit the masking tape seal with one of its sharp, yellow nails. Clumsily it pushed open the flaps and peered inside. The carton was full, five hundred packs. Tar took out one of the packets and



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"A woman suckled her foetal child not upon milk but on the thick streams of tar that trickled over her distended abdomen"

flipped the top. Taking one of the filterless cigarettes in its stained hand, the Creature sniffed at it and rolled it under his nostrils.

'Good,' it rasped.

Then it put the smoke between pudgy lips and attempted a smile.

'Gotta light?'

It was such a simple request, but it sent Greg reeling. He fumbled in his trouser pockets, hoping to God that he had a lighter or a match. The creature seemed a little disappointed when at last Greg pulled a packet of safety matches from his pocket. Such things of course were virtually unheard of these days, but Greg had one of those old gas stoves that had to be lit manually. It had been his mother's and he'd never seen the need to exchange it for a more modern appliance when it did the job just as well.

He struck the match. It flared briefly. Greg leaned towards the Creature, trying not to make his deep revulsion too obvious. He lit the cigarette. Suddenly, the Creature's other arm shot out and, grabbing hold of the man's jacket, pulled him down towards its oversized head. It pulled him close. So close that the brand could have taken out Greg's eye. The heat singed his lashes. Tar's mouth twisted and then he released the jacket. He had seen the fear in the man's eyes, and that was enough.

For now.

'Thank you,' he said, as pleasantly as he could. 'You may go.'

Greg ran as fast as his legs would carry him. Out of the room, down the long corridor and onto the stairs. He took them two at a time, retching dryly as he ran. Suddenly the step beneath him seemed to collapse. There was a groan from under him. He looked down, and screamed.

He'd stepped on something's ribcage. At first he thought the gnarled husk beneath him must be a corpse left to rot in the ash. But no. It was still alive. Its head emerged from beneath the carpet of dog ends. The flesh on its face was papery, its eyes oozed, its nose had rotted away. The thing exhaled, its breath was hot and fetid. The smoker's skeletal fingers closed around Greg's legs. He heard bones splinter and prayed they were not his. His foot came free. His plimsolls were drenched with mucus. Strands of festering entrails clung around his foot. Greg shook them off and vomited down his shirt.

Seconds later he was back outside drinking huge gulps of morning air. It felt clean and pure. He wiped his mouth and crossed the wasteland back to the car. He didn't look back. He'd decided never to go back. In the morning, he and Jackie would pack a bag and put as many miles as possible between them and this foul place. They'd go somewhere they could never be found. Greg wouldn't even collect his payment from the usual place. He knew Tar was toying with him.

Greg jumped into the car. He could smell the stench on his clothes and body now. He turned on the ignition and the cold air blower, opened all the windows and the sunshine roof. The tyres squealed as he pulled away.

The engine roared. He crunched through the five-speed gear box and turned the radio full on. The headlights blazed. He tore down the East India Dock Road and then through Limehouse's derelict back streets with his foot pressed firmly to the floor.

Tar's gas-powered klaxon echoed through the

building, calling the disciples to court. They came slowly at first, shadows in the smoke, emerging from their special places, from beneath the stairs, from niches in the walls, from the rafters in the roof. All who could, made their way to Tar's room, many were riddled with disease, some were grotesque parodies of humankind, others had mutated far beyond the confines of normal anatomy. They came in their hundreds, filing into the rooms like wraiths, queuing patiently for their tobacco ration, their coughing more subdued now because they knew relief was close at hand. Tar would provide for them as he always had. Some had seen the vile man walk through their hallowed corridors and defile their sweet air with his rank breath. But they knew he was a necessary evil, and accepted his presence as a shark might except a wrasse. Tar apologised for the size of the week's quota. He told them he would rectify the situation and reassured them it would not happen again. For their part, the Children of the Smoke listened with hushed reverence (or as near to a hush that they could manage) to his high voice as he told them what he proposed to do about it.

The second phone booth Greg tried hadn't been vandalised. He'd almost missed it and had run back from where he left the car ten yards further on. The place reeked of stale urine. For a long time nobody answered and then, at last, came Jackie's weary voice;

'Hello?'

'Jackie, it's me. Are you OK?'

'It's two a.m.... I've felt better.'

'We have to go away in the morning.'

Outside the booth the smoke had drifted in. It crept and billowed, lighting the night with its phosphorescence. Greg knew nothing of it until he left the telephone box, and by then it was too late.

His car had been systematically wrecked. All four tyres were slashed, the rear ones practically torn from their rims. One of the doors lay against a hedge on the opposite side of the road, the others gaped open like wounds. The cabin was filled with thick, white smoke which seemed to glow and pulsate.

There was no sign of the wreckers. Greg ran to the car and heaved himself into the driver's seat. Most of the instrumentation had been smashed. The stereo had been ripped out and trailed wires across the passenger seat. The windscreen was fractured and blackened with ash and soot. 'Bastards,' he said, over and over again. And then he saw the cigarette packet dangling from the rearview. He stopped it spinning and snatched it down. Three words had been scrawled upon it.

WE WANT YOU.

Ten miles away, Jackie Denton started to cough. She had slept only fitfully since Greg's call and the cold air b'owing through the bedroom window was not helping any. She sat on the edge of the bed until the coughing fit had subsided and then got up to close the window. A fog had drawn up, she noticed. Only it didn't look like the normal summer radiation fog. And it had a twang to it, a strange odour. Almost as if, behind its shadowy veils, a huge bonfire crackled and hissed. Still coughing, she got up out of bed, walked into the kitchen and poured herself a tumbler of water. It was nearly three. Greg should be home soon. She looked down the street. The fog had crept over everything. It billowed in a strange way, almost like a cumulus, and at its centre a bright light appeared to burn. It smouldered, growing brighter

"Strands of festering entrails clung around his foot"

and brighter, pulsing, dividing like an animal cell. Jackie downed the glass in one and walked quickly back into her bedroom. Then she pulled the covers about her and prayed for sleep.

The Children heard the taxi approaching long before it turned the corner at the top of the street. Greg had been lucky, he could have waited hours for a night bus. The cab came to a halt outside the flat. Greg got out, paid the driver and hurried inside. He climbed the stairs quickly, anxious that the unpleasant odour that clung to his body shouldn't linger. He hoped that Jackie was all right. The key bent in the lock and he had to remove it and straighten it before he could get inside. He could see Jackie on the bed, one arm hung limply over the edge. The T-shirt she slept in had ridden up, exposing one of her breasts. He crossed over to her.

'Jackie,' he whispered to the darkness. She didn't reply.

Crouching down by the bed, he whispered her name once more. She murmured something and changed position. God, she was beautiful. He leant forward and kissed her forehead, and then he crept stealthily past her into the bathroom. Once inside, he locked the door and turned the shower on. First he stood under it fully dressed and tried to remove some of the acrid odour from his clothes. Then he stepped out of the sodden garments and began to scrub at his body with soap and a brush. Soot and ash seemed to have found their way into every nook and cranny, between his buttocks, his toes, even under his foreskin. It was fifteen minutes before clean water ran off his body.

Greg gathered the wet clothes together, kicked open the door of the washing machine and bundled them in, pumps and all. Then he talcumed his body and smothered himself with cologne until, at last, he felt human again. Finally he opened the louvre windows and sprayed the room with Pinefresh.

Then he closed the door behind him and stepped out into the bedroom.

And saw her.

Jackie.

She was propped up against the headboard. Staring straight at him. But he knew she couldn't see him.

Because she had no eyes.

He ran across the room and threw himself onto the bed. He felt her neck, but there was no pulse. Tears came quickly. Tears of guilt. He screamed with anger and frustration, he cradled her scorched head to his chest and, hopelessly, rocked her backwards and forwards.

And all the while Tar stood in the darkness in a corner of the room and watched.

'Touching,' the Creature said in a sing song voice, when it could contain itself no longer.

Greg turned and saw the hideous thing step out of the shadows. It looked at him with its smoke-reddened eyes.

'It's hard to do without something you love,' it said, pulling on a cigarette. The smoke curled around the Creature in the half light.

'You little shit!' Greg managed to spit through his tears.

Nodding its over-large head, it attempted a pathetic little smile again. Only now it did not seem quite so pathetic. Tar dribbled from the fleshy tubes, down its belly and onto the carpet. Great flurries of ash swirled around it as it moved. It started towards the bead, waddling on stumpy

legs and malformed feet. Dark hammer-head clouds of acrid smoke leaked from its nose and mouth. The two trunks swayed pendulously, splattering the walls with slick, black tar.

'Keep away from me!'

'We belong together, Greg. We want you,' it chuckled.

Then, springing with surprising speed and agility, it was upon him. Greg felt a terrible pain in his stomach and looked down to see the creature pulling its two taloned fingers away from a ragged wound they had opened there. The thing had gouged him. Greg looked down in disbelief at the dark banners of blood oozing over his fingers, and then fell backwards over the bed. He reached out and pulled over the bedside lamp with its heavy marbled stand. It landed by his head.

'You fucking animal!' Greg screamed.

'No. Don't call me that. I'm just a disease.'

Tar edged towards him. Greg could feel himself losing consciousness. His fingers closed around the lamp stand. The thing bent over him. Then, in one last determined effort, Greg hurled the lamp at the Creature's huge head. It staggered back, making a terrible mewling sound, arms and leg flailing, beating against its torso as if in some unholy act of self-chastisement. The thing spun in a vortex of ash, its head lolling back and forth uncontrollably. Greg could see that he'd opened the creature's skull. Sheets of black fluid coursed down the thing's face. It tried to keep the tar from its eyes but it was a battle the Creature could not win. In fear and frustration it ruptured one of its eyeballs with its sharp fingernails. Then it slumped to its knees, and collapsed against the far wall.

For a moment, Greg was convinced it was dead.

'Die, you bastard!' Greg wailed at it. He looked at his stomach. A loop of intestine had slid out over his hand. It felt deliciously warm.

The Creature lifted its black face from its chest and spoke. 'Oh, I had parents but I was an addict before I left the womb. I made that work for me...' It laughed, a sad ironic laugh. 'I'm the thinking man's cancer, or the thinking cancer's man, whichever way you want to look at it.'

Greg's eyes fluttered closed.

'No, don't go yet. I want to get out and about more, expand my horizons a bit.'

Greg couldn't help himself. He started to laugh. There was bile or something pulsing over his fingers now. Somehow it didn't matter.

'My mind, your body... How about it?' - the Creature said.

And then it started to spasm. The whole body shook. Its head began to split apart. The puffy skin tore like old parchment, the skull splintered like rotten wood. And then the tumorous mass of living cancerous flesh burst open cranium and flopped onto the carpet in front of the Creature's still quivering body.

Dimly, Greg could see the thing he had known as Tar rapidly decomposing in the corner of the room, whilst the repulsive maggot-like cancer that had thrived in and controlled that hideously mutated body, edged across the carpet towards him.

By the time the Cancer had reached his body, Greg had passed out in a fugue of pain and revulsion. Slowly it heaved its pustulant bulk up onto Greg's abdomen. Two tactile barbels wetly probed the man's stomach wound.

The message they sent back confirmed it.

From now on, this was Home.

"It's hard to do without something you love," it said, pulling on a cigarette"

THE JOURNEY

Cliff Ramshaw

"Come no closer, Sir Knight, for I am Aclan, slayer of dragonslayers, devourer of women, children and wizards"

Aclan was old, and the fact filled him with emptiness. His age was written in rust across his huge bulk and showed in the dimming fire of his eyes. Unlubricated joints groaned as he moved on his last, desperate journey and, though reason and pain told him otherwise, he knew he was fated to arrive. No longer able to fly, he was forced to crawl over hills and across plains at an ever decreasing rate.

The sun set to end yet another day of travel and fatigue overcame Aclan. He fell asleep beneath the brightening stars, dreaming that they were the souls of those he had murdered.

He awoke to the whistling of the wind through his decaying body. The sky was high and pale with few clouds and the sun was distant, but bright. Where once it would have sparkled on shining silver, it now highlighted dull red scales flaking from his frame.

He lay near the top of a hill, surrounded by lush green fields. In the far north he could see a thick forest; beyond that were foothills and mountains made blue by the distance. Looking to the crest of the hill, he saw a church. He felt an immediate affinity; the building was partially ruined, with moss and ivy struggling to cover its walls and collapsed roof.

Then a voice rang in the air: 'Hold, foul monster! I am Sir Griman, dragonslayer, and it is my duty to dispatch you henceforth to Hell!'

Aclan raised his head and looked to the source of the sound with bored indifference. A man on a huge, white horse rode out from behind the church. He was covered in armour of bright steel and, as he approached, Aclan saw that he was carrying a lance and had a broadsword by his side.

Resigned to his role, Aclan began to speak. 'Come no closer, Sir Knight, for I am Aclan, slayer of dragonslayers, devourer of women, children and wizards.' He found the rider quite risible, and made no attempt to disguise the sarcasm in his voice. 'I am the Wind of Change, the servant of Chaos. I lay waste to everything in my path. I am Irony; for I am the destructive Force of Nature, but created by Man!'

With that, he raised himself up as well as he could and spread his wings wide. One wing, however, refused to open. The other, a collection of jointed steel foils, fanned out to reveal several cracks and gaping holes.

With a hint of self-pity, he continued, 'And I am new and unique, yet I am old beyond measure.'

To Aclan's surprise, the knight threw down his lance, dismounted and walked to within six feet of the dragon's snout. He spoke softly, kindly. 'Then save your breath, Aclan. I have no quarrel with one as ancient and harmless as you.'

'Harmless! Save my breath! My breath has set entire villages aflame, my tail has toppled mountains. My teeth drip venom and my claws have torn men in two. What manner of fool dares to describe me as harmless?'

'I apologise for my careless words, O Great One, but I see that you are tired with the years, and that Death must soon take you. I will be on my way and trouble you no longer.'

With this, Sir Griman began to walk back to his horse.

Then go in fear, knowing that I shall find and slay you, if I have a mind!

Aclan's voice was a mixture of indignation and rhetoric — the knight had quite confused him.

Sir Griman mounted his horse and began to ride down the hill. Then he paused, turned in his saddle and shouted: 'Noble dragon, I beg of you, let me journey a while with you.'

Aclan was taken aback. His curiosity (a thing he had not exercised in a long time) forced him to reply: 'Then ride with me if you will. But beware, for I am prone to fits of rage and destruction. The path I travel is long and perilous. Ride with me only if you place no value on your life.'

And so they headed north together. They travelled for several days and exchanged stories and anecdotes as they went. Aclan began to develop a grudging respect for the knight, who in turn seemed both amused and moved by the old dragon.

Late one afternoon, Sir Griman turned to Aclan. 'My friend, we approach a village, and I fear that the inhabitants will not welcome you with open arms.'

He thought for a moment, then continued, 'I will go to the village and allay their fears. There is a small cave five miles north of here where we may meet. It is better if you wait until the evening before continuing on your way.'

Aclan agreed to the plan, and Sir Griman rode away in the direction of the village he had indicated. The old dragon rested until nightfall, then resumed his journey.

On approaching the cave that Sir Griman had described, Aclan saw that the knight was already there, tending to a small campfire. Aclan dragged himself clumsily up to the fire and lay down.

'Ah,' sighed Aclan, 'there is nothing for me like the magic of fire... Tell me, Sir Griman, what did you say to the villagers?'

Sir Griman laughed, then said: 'I told them that a mighty dragon approached and that they should lock themselves indoors until he had passed. I said that I was following you back to your lair in order to slay you and take your treasure.'

Aclan laughed also. 'You realise, I hope, that I shall never again return to my lair?'

'I know.' The knight looked saddened.

'But what of the villagers? What did they say?'

'They were terrified. I thought them unable to move at first, but then they locked themselves away in their homes and barred the doors. It was exceedingly difficult to keep a straight face whilst speaking with them.'

Both Aclan and Sir Griman burst into loud shouts of mirth. Through fits of giggles, Sir Griman continued.

'There was one young lad who wanted to come with me. He wanted to help me kill the dragon. I told him it was much too dangerous and left him with his mother. Then I came here.'

He laughed, but Aclan took on a more serious tone.

'Aye,' he reflected, 'it was always the young ones who were the worst. It's a good thing you and I have more sense.'

Without warning, a shadowy figure brandishing a shortsword and shouting a battle cry ran at them from the darkness. Aclan turned to the figure and opened his mouth wide. His teeth were huge daggers, blunted and notched with use and stained black with spent venom. The attacker froze at the sight, and his arms fell loosely to his sides. Aclan advanced on his victim, his eyes burning cruelly. He seemed to be about to swallow him whole when Sir Griman called out in alarm.

Aclan stopped in his tracks, and Sir Griman walked over to the figure and dragged him by the ear into the firelight. It was a boy, fourteen or perhaps fifteen years old.

'I told you to stay in the village, you young idiot!' Sir Griman's voice was scathing. 'What do you think you are doing here?'

The boy was shaking, his voice high and uncertain.

'I had come to help you slay the dragon, but when I saw that you were a... a traitor, I decided to kill you both.'

Feigning anger, Aclan roared, 'You think you could harm me, boy? I, who killed the sorcerer who created me on the very day I was born? He was mad with malice and self-love, and even now his soul dances for my pleasure in the ruby of my left eye. And so do the souls of all whom I have devoured!'

He turned his bejewelled gaze on the youngster. Indeed, there was a flickering in the two gems that were his eyes, but it was a shadow compared to the brightness that had been there in his youth.

To Aclan's amazement, the boy was neither shocked nor horrified, but impressed.

'You killed a sorcerer?' he asked. 'Was he evil? Was it a long battle? How many more have you killed?'

Aclan delighted in the boy's curiosity and began, with enormous pleasure, to recount his great misdeeds. Sir Griman, having heard the stories before, lay down and fell asleep as they talked into the night.

They arose the next morning and the three of them continued northwards. The boy was fascinated by the tales of Aclan, who was happy to speak of his grandiose exploits all day. Sir Griman would occasionally add a story of his own but was, for the most part, silent. By nightfall they had reached the eaves of the forest where they decided to make camp.

In the morning, Sir Griman approached the lad.

'Today we travel into the forest. You, however, must return to your village. Your mother will be worried about you.'

The boy was close to tears as he spoke: 'But Sir Griman, I am a grown man now. I want to travel with you and Aclan.'

'No. You have had your adventure. Here, take Sylvester, my horse, and ride back to your village as a hero. You may say that you helped me slay the dragon.'

Though overjoyed with the gift, the boy was nevertheless saddened to leave. He bade Aclan and Sir Griman farewell and rode back along the route which they had come.

Aclan and Sir Griman entered the forest. The air was full of the sounds of singing birds and of the tall fir trees whispering in the wind. The dark interior was coloured blue and grey and green; the sweet smells of pine and grass were everywhere. The forest path was stony and uneven, never more than about ten feet wide. It caused Aclan much dif-

ficulty in his passage. Often he would wince in agony after catching a wing on a nearby tree or stumbling into a ditch.

The journey through the forest took three days, and all the while the friendship between the unlikely pair grew stronger.

By the evening of the third day they had begun to climb into the foothills where the trees were much less dense. Aclan looked at his friend and said: 'We shall reach the mountains with another day's travel. I fear, Sir Griman, that soon we must part.'

Sir Griman nodded in agreement.

'As you have guessed, I am travelling to the Dragons' Graveyard — a place where no man may go.'

'Yes, but I shall come with you as far as I may,' replied the knight, 'It's ironic, I know, but I feel a strong bond between us, despite your evil deeds.'

Aclan looked troubled. Then he said, 'Do you think, Sir Griman, that I may go to Heaven?'

'I do not know, noble dragon. The priests speak of Heaven as a place for the pure and just. However, I know of no man without sin. I think, perhaps, that there is a place for all of us when we die.'

'Your words do little to reassure me. I cannot recall one pure or just deed that I have performed in all my years.'

'You amused the young boy. Think of the tale he will have to tell his friends when he returns!'

'Yes,' laughed Aclan, 'although even kindness to others is ultimately a selfish act. You know, the most important word in my vocabulary has always been *T*.'

'And in everyone else's too, I think,' replied Sir Griman.

By the afternoon of the next day they had reached a narrow pass surrounded on both sides by sheer mountains. Sir Griman stopped and said, 'I can go no further, my friend. There is a strong magic here that slows my every step — I have felt it all day — and now it brings me to a halt.'

'Then I must bid you farewell, brave Sir Griman. But before you go, tell me, when you lied to the villagers — was that your first sin?'

Sir Griman smiled.

'Yes.'

He placed a hand on the dragon's head and said, 'Goodbye, Aclan, may we meet again someday!'

Then he turned and began to walk back towards the forest.

Aclan shouted after him: 'Perhaps in heaven, Sir Griman. Goodbye!'

The journey through the mountain pass was the most difficult part of all. Just as Aclan thought he could endure it no longer, he came out into a wide valley surrounded by tall, forbidding mountains of brilliant white stone. He had arrived at the Dragons' Graveyard.

It was a magnificent sight. The sun was just above the western peaks and much of the valley was in darkness. Huge skeletons, in various stages of decay, were strewn everywhere, many had turned to a fine white powder which covered the ground. There were no signs of life, only the cold presence of countless phantoms amongst the long shadows.

There was a large space devoid of debris in the very centre of the valley, still fully illuminated by the westerling sun. Aclan crawled there with the last of his strength. He lay down and waited to die. And, that night, a new star shone in the heavens.



Cliff Ramshaw is an ex-computer whizz kid who graduated from the University of London with a degree in Physics with Astrophysics. Cliff currently lives in South London, plays guitar and is writing a novel about the relationship between intuition and Reason as expressed by the forces of Love and Magic.

"His teeth were huge daggers, blunted and notched with use and stained black with spent venom"

A BITER BIT

BY
SIMON
CLARK

**"The thug
stared at me
like he wanted
to cut me
up — one
bloody
lump at a
time"**

What is he going to do to us?
The big man in the skull and
crossbones T-Shirt and cowboy
boots leered.

'Search me, buster. But it'll hurt like hell. You can
be sure of that.'

We never touched the car. Honest to God, we
never touched it.'

Angrily, he shoved me back against the wall and
started shouting; so close, the spit from his mouth
sprayed my face.

'Never touched it? Never fucking touched it? Just
what were you two doing round here then? All this
— the nightclub, this car park — is Mr White's
private property. When he parks his car here,' he
jerked his thumb at a black Porsche, 'he likes to
think it's safe from useless drunks like you. Three
times in the last fortnight someone's slashed his
tyres, and now...'

'We didn't do it,' I said, wiping the spit from my
face. 'Like I said, we only wanted to find
somewhere quiet for a drink. Anyway, we only got
into town yesterday, so it couldn't...'

'Ahh...' The big man stabbed his forefinger into
my chest so hard I thought my ribs would crack.
'Sure, sure, we believe you. Sure as we believe pigs
sprout bacon wings and fly round the friggin'
moon. Shit head!'

I shrugged. 'Do it then. Give us a good hiding
and just get it over with.'

This suggestion surprised him, and he stopped
and looked back at his two bouncer mates as if in

need of some backup.

'Kick his face in, Pinner,' growled one.
Pinner turned back to me.

'What's the game then? Usually you sort, if
you're not too pissed, beg a little bit first.' He
grinned back at the other two. 'That's before we
kick seven balls of shit out of you, that is.'

I raised my chin and pointed at it.

'Go on. Do it. Now.'

The big man shook his head, puzzled.

'You two have to be the weirdest boozers yet.' He
looked at the tall, skinny man who stood by my
side. 'What about your mate, then? Not saying
much, is he?'

'Emmerson never says anything. Leave him
alone. If you want to beat someone black-and-
blue... Me. I'm the one.'

'No way.' Pinner paused to wipe carefully a mark
from his highly-polished, brown cowboy boots. 'Mr
White is really... *upset* about his car. He's only had it
a month, you see. So he's going to attend to you
two gentlemen personally. Right.' He nodded at
one of the bouncers — a huge moon-faced bloke
who looked like an ex-wrestler.

'Jock, you watch these two. We're going back
inside. Mr White'll be tied up until we close
tonight. Stevie'll give you a break soon.'

The bouncer grunted an affirmative.

'Mr White wants to wet his hands with some
blood tonight. If these two leg it, it might just be
yours, Jock. All right?'

Briefly I heard the thud-thud-thud of music as
they opened the fire exit door, then it was silent
again.

It was too dark to see much. Just a couple of cars
in the car park lit by street lamps. A mile away,
floodlights shone on the winding gear and
buildings of a coal mine next to which a black slag
heap rose up into the night sky like some weird
mountain built from the same stuff as hell.

I thought of running, but Emmerson could
hardly walk, let alone run. All I could do was stand
there with the night wind blowing through my
ripped old army coat — and wait. The thug stared
at me like he wanted to cut me up — one bloody
lump at a time.

I pulled Emmerson's sleeve. He didn't respond,

but gazed across at the brilliant pit lights like he was seeing something no one else could. Knowing Emmerson, maybe he was.

'You all right?' I whispered. 'You had enough to drink?'

A long pause. Then, a nod. A slow one. 'Good, good. Let me know if you need more.'

People drink for different reasons (and I'm not talking about social drinking here), but usually the result's the same: it kills the pain, whether it's in your body or in your heart. Drink kills it dead. The pain of an affair that's gone rotten, the pain of knowing you own nothing in the whole wide world, and you don't know where your next meal is coming from.

But Emmerson had his own special reason.

And I made sure he had a regular supply — whisky, brandy, vodka (not gin, though, he reacted badly to that) — and if not spirits, lager, the strong stuff like Carlsberg Special Brew, Stella and Pils.

Me, I drink too much for reasons of my own. Personal reasons. Anyway, they aren't important here. I only wish to God they had been.

We'd been drinking on and off since midday, so I reckoned Emmerson would be okay. Also, in my coat pocket reposed half a bottle of vodka — just in case.

'We never touched the car, you know.'

The bouncer whom Pinner had called Jock grunted, caveman-style. 'Uhh... Shit.'

'We just got into town.'

'Shit... Uhh...'

Jock wasn't interested unless we ran, so I passed Emmerson the vodka. Better safe than sorry.

'Don't worry,' I whispered to Emmerson. 'These blokes'll knock us about a bit, but we can take that. We've been through worse, eh? Here, have another swallow.'

The half bottle of Tesco vodka shone and sparkled in the lights of the coal mine. It looked as pure as fucking holy water. And, in Emmerson's case, it worked miracles, too.

'Hey, Jock! What you doing?'

The voice belonged to Pinner. It sounded vicious.

'This isn't a flaming cocktail party y'know.'

Jock gave a wordless grunt.

Oi, you — stick man,' he barked at Emmerson.

No more. Understand?'

Emmerson carried on drinking.

'You listen, cretin,' spat Pinner, and swung a high kick at Emmerson. The polished toe of the cowboy boot stabbed deep into Emmerson's gut. With a weird coughing sound, Emmerson folded like a thin pole breaking in two. There was no expression on his face; his two skinny arms were just wrapped tightly around his stomach as he knelt there on the white gravel.

Then he did something I had never seen him do before.

He retched.

Everything he'd drunk for the past three hours came heaving out in a steaming pool.

'Oh Christ,' I panted, feeling something cold move into my spine. 'Oh Christ. Why did you have to do that?'

The two thugs laughed and Pinner picked up the vodka bottle and emptied it onto the floor. 'You'll listen to me in future won't you, buster?' Chortling, he went back into the nightclub.

We waited. Jock, said nothing and smoked cigarettes, his stupid face set solid. Leaning back against the wall, I felt the booze gradually wear off. I prayed that their precious Mr White would get

himself outside and do whatever it was he so badly wanted to do to us. I kept telling myself that, if Emmerson hadn't thrown up, we'd have been all right. We could have gone to the supermarket as soon as it opened and bought those lovely golden cans of Carlsberg Special, then everything would have been fine. Emmerson would have been fine. The whole damn world would have been fine.

But everything was not fine.

The contents of Emmerson's stomach were seeping away through the gravel, and Emmerson himself...

I studied him closely.

No...

It had begun.

Emmerson's eyelids were thick and puffy; the lines on his face, normally as thin as a goat's, had vanished; the skin was smooth, making him look fifteen years younger.

This sudden age loss was caused by his face swelling. That, in turn, chilled me through to the backbone. I looked at his hands. They were swelling too.

I began to pace between the black Porsche and the wall of the nightclub. It was all going wrong. Everything I had worked for was unravelling. I bit my knuckle. I couldn't control it any longer. It was out of my hands.

Emmerson stared blankly at the coal-mine lights. He didn't move; no expression altered his blank face.

Perhaps it would be okay, perhaps we'd make it after all, perhaps... No...

Emmerson undid the top three buttons of a shirt that now looked three sizes too small for him. Then he licked his lips. A long, slow lick. His tongue (which also was swollen) slid slowly from left to right over his dry mouth.

As dawn approached, turning the sky a mass of peachy tints, Mr White stepped out of the nightclub. He was accompanied by Pinner, who now leered even more broadly. White was dressed in a pale cream suit, red silk tie and handmade shoes and he toyed with a clunking gold identity bracelet which hung about one wrist. As he weighed us up, he stood the way most men who wield power stand — facing us square, legs unnaturally wide, as if waiting for someone to run a wheelbarrow between them. Normally, the sight would have made me laugh. Not now though. I knew what was brewing.

These the two?'

His voice was low. White did not need to shout in order to maintain authority.

'Yes, Mr White,' Pinner said deferentially.

'I thought you said one was tall and skinny?'

Pinner pointed in astonishment at Emmerson.

'That was him. When I left him a couple of hours ago he was as thin as a rake.'

'Pinner, my old son,' White lit a cigar as thick as his thumb. 'You need an eye test. Look at him. He's as plump as your mother-in-law.'

The pair of thugs laughed the way people do when their boss cracks a joke. Loudly — and far too long. But I could see that Pinner was troubled.

White turned his eyes on me. They were hard and cunning.

'You've been messing with my car. My beautiful new car. Why?'

'Give my friend a drink, Mr White. Please... he needs a drink, desperate.'

My request surprised him.

'A drink? A drink? Sure, whatever you want.'



SIMON CLARK lives in Doncaster. An earlier story of his was featured in FEAR Issue 4 and others have appeared in magazines such as *Works*, *Stygian*, *Dreamhouse* and *Back Brain Recluse*. His influences include Arthur Machen, Jimi Hendrix and the films of Boris Karloff.

"With a weird coughing sound, Emmerson folded like a thin pole breaking in two"

"The skin turned shiny and the thick arteries, like parasitic worms, were visible wriggling beneath the tight skin"

Jock,' he looked round, 'run and get a bottle of champagne for our friends. Oh, and make sure it's chilled.'

Jock looked as though he was about to obey. 'Stay where you are, cloth-head.' White turned back to us. 'You two are brass-faced, I'll give you that. You pissing-well vandalise my car, then you calmly stand there and ask for free drinks. Who the hell do you think you are?'

'Please, Mr White.' I was trembling — but not for reasons White would understand. 'A drink. Please. Anything. He needs one. And... and we didn't touch your car. We're new here, we don't...'

'That's it,' Pinner exclaimed, with relief. 'I knew there was something wrong with this bloke. He was dead skinny when we got him — a damn bean pole! Now look at him. He's ballooning. Look at the size of his neck.'

'You're right, Pinner. It's his liver.' White nodded knowledgeably. 'The booze'll have turned it hard as boot leather. The bastard's filling up with fluid.' He pointed the cigar at Emmerson. 'You don't need a drink, mate, you need intensive care.'

He laughed and the others joined in. I glanced back at Emmerson and felt a lurch in my gut; his eyes were coming into focus. For longer than I could remember, he'd worn that dazed, dreamy look. For twenty years I'd kept him drunk; now, at long last, he was sobering up.

I saw him look round and begin to take notice of his surroundings: the white gravel car park, the black Porsche, the ground that sloped down into a shallow valley then reared up steeply into the slag-heap with the pit itself to one side.

Then I saw it. Like lots of other things that night it was something I'd not seen in nearly two decades. My stomach churned. He had swallowed, a hard and deliberate gulping motion as if exercising muscles he'd not used in years. The flesh on his bloated throat shook like jelly.

White said: 'Fat boy. You still want a drink? Whisky and lemonade? Martini Rosso? Babycham... with a cherry?'

The three of them laughed. It was a sound I hated.

Emmerson slowly shook his massive head. 'No...'

No... L... L... L... I knew what that grunting voice would say. I just knew.

He spoke. 'Food...'
'Food? You want food now?' said White in mock concern.

Again the heavy nod. And Emmerson's voice rumbled: 'Food... I want... To eat... NOW.'

'No, Emmerson,' I shouted wildly. 'No. We'll get you a drink, anything you want, L...'

He slap across my face shut me up. White pointed at me angrily.

'I've had enough of your games. Interfering with a man's car is like interfering with his woman — it hurts. Do you understand that? It bleeding well hurts. Now...' White pulled a Stanley knife from his pocket. 'Now, I'm going to mark you for life, you shit head.'

But the blade, glinting in the dawn light, didn't interest me. I was watching Emmerson.

White and Jock stood facing me with their backs to Pinner and Emmerson. Emmerson... He was staring at Pinner's bare arm, as if he had something small but intensely interesting stuck to his left elbow.

'I am... HUNGRY,' Emmerson grunted wetly. 'Sure, sure,' Pinner said not looking at him, 'you can chew on my size eleven boot in about three minutes' time.'

'But first, the lippy bastard,' said White, almost softly. 'I'm going to hang his ear on my key ring. Something to remember him by.'

Emmerson reached up a hand — now a massive paw all swollen and pulpy — and took hold of Pinner's bare arm at the elbow.

'Hey, what's the game, Fatsos?' At first Pinner laughed in disbelief. 'Let go. You'll get yours in a minute.'

White chuckled. 'Looks as if he's got a crush on you, Pinner.'

Crush... I could see Emmerson's great clamp of a hand tightening.

Slowly... Slowly...
'Hey... Fatsos. Let go, or I'll break your neck.'

Emmerson did not let go and when Pinner punched him he might as well have punched the nightclub wall.

'Hey! Get him off me. Mr White... Mr White!'
The panic tightened Pinner's voice. 'Mr White, he's...'

White and Jock spun round; what they saw nailed their feet to the earth.

Now Emmerson was panting excitedly, like something dead that had been shocked back to life by lightning. Huge breaths, a wet crackling sound like a man with bronchitis hawking sputum up from his throat.

'Mr White... Ah... The bastard's hurting. He's... Ah!'

Emmerson stared at the arm in his grip, fascinated.

By this time, White's cigar had drooped out of his gaping mouth and he stared stupidly at the scene.

'Get him off me,' begged Pinner hysterically. 'Ah! White, listen you stupid bastard!'

Jock recovered from his astonishment enough to make a clumsy charge at Emmerson, but the giant hardly noticed. He shrugged his arm lazily and Jock spun through the air, the ex-wrestler's feet flipping higher than his head. When he hit the ground I felt the concussion bite through the soles of my shoes.

Jock lay still. Pinner looked into Emmerson's eyes and his sanity gave way.

'No... Nooo-owe... Oh... Ohhhhh...' he screamed. He was still screaming when his arm snapped. At this point, Emmerson switched his attention to Pinner's forehead. He bent his massive head, bigger than a bull's, towards it.

For one mad moment I thought Emmerson was going to kiss him. But the mouth stretched wider and the wet, hawking sound grew faster. His lips touched the top of Pinner's head.

The screams rang back from the nightclub walls. Slowly, smoothly, Emmerson's gaping mouth began to pass over the top of the screaming man's head, over Pinner's frantic eyes, down over his nose. Then they were over that howling mouth.

Then there was silence.

Emmerson's jaw stretched wider and never made a single chewing motion; his throat muscles alone seemed to be dragging the man down, remorselessly engulfing him in that pink cavern that had once been the thin-lipped mouth of a skinny drunk.

Emmerson's eyes, now set at either side of the

deformed face, were closed; as if he were savouring this delicious, wriggling morsel.

Momentarily, the throat which had been loosely flaccid stretched tight. It was like watching a rubber inner-tube being overinflated. The throat was distended into a single huge blister — white, bloodless white — the skin turned shiny and the thick arteries, liked parasitic worms, were visible wriggling beneath the tight skin. I saw a struggling shape. Like swollen glands, two lumps appeared at either side of the neck where Pinner's two fists pushed uselessly. Then came the face. Frantically it thrust against the elastic skin. I saw the outline of a forehead, a flattened nose, a chin, and then a mouth — wide open in a silent, agonised scream.

The skull and crossbones T-shirt slipped out of sight.

Emmerson straightened up, with Pinner's legs still frantically kicking in the air, the brown boots just a blur. He began to jerk up and down as if trying to shake down what he was swallowing. His lips stretched tight as the huge mouth opened even wider until his jaw dislocated with a gigantic crack that echoed shockingly in the empty car park. Suddenly, the legs and those brown cowboy boots slipped out of sight. Just for a second, Emmerson's stomach distended hideously through his open shirt then contracted sharply, crushing the lump out of existence.

White and I watched everything in a kind of rigor mortis of horror.

Emmerson looked round. His eyes were alive and intelligent now. A deep throbbing bass sound came from his throat. Satisfaction. Pleasure.

I heard a groan. Jock was pulling himself into a kneeling position, his black suit covered in white patches from the gravel. The man coughed and spat out gobs of blood, gravel and splintered teeth.

Emmerson's crimson mouth opened grotesquely. Although he may have been grinning, it looked more like an injury caused by an axe. There was a sharp click as his jaw relocated.

His dark, shining eyes fixed on the floored bouncer.

Then, swiftly, he swung his thick arms down and easily hoisted the dazed man up into the air above his swollen head.

Holding up his prize, Emmerson began to run, passing straight between us and jumping onto the black Porsche like it was a stepping stone. His, now bare, feet with their over-large toenails smashed

down, crunching the gleaming black roof and shattering the windscreen. Then he was running downhill, feet splattering the gravel like two great hammers.

'Emmerson!' I shouted desperately. 'Come back! Come back! Don't you see? There's nowhere to run! Emmerson, Emmerson!'

I called until my throat was hoarse. Then, furiously, I turned on White.

'This is your fault, you bastard! Not mine! I looked after him. I kept it under control. It was me who sacrificed everything. I had a wife, you know. A little boy — four years old. Hey! Are you listening?'

I lashed at White, catching him on the cheekbone. It wasn't a hard blow but he yelped pathetically and fell cowering by his car.

I left them both to look after Emmerson. He cost me my family, my money and all my bloody life. But we were getting by. Things were working out. Not now though! Not now!

Whimpering, White tried to huddle tighter against the wrecked Porsche, his ears blotching purple, white face shining wetly like it had been smeared with margarine — he looked like a man a heartbeat away from thrombosis.

For a moment I wondered whether to run after Emmerson. There was no point. I knew I could never catch up with him now. Already he was climbing the spoil-heap a mile away. He appeared as a gigantic figure, gleaming as white as a bone against the black slag.

Above his head, the limp body of the man swung like a rag doll. Then, as I watched, they vanished amongst the black hills.

Feeling like I'd seen the coming of the Apocalypse, I turned back to White who still clung to the wreckage of his precious car.

'See what you've gone and done?'

He winced. My anger fired my words like bullets.

'Just what the hell am I going to do now?'

"Just what the hell am I going to do now?"



"British Fantasy Convention: The Mating Season"

That season is upon us. In a matter of weeks professionals and fans everywhere will be packing their suitcases and heading off in the direction of the British and World Fantasy Conventions. It is one of the few times in the year when fans can gather, talk about the past twelve months, bitch about some of the most appalling things they've seen during that time, and consume large amounts of alcohol.

Newcomers might feel left out and, from my description, may feel initially that we're a bunch of animals pandering to our baser instincts. To some extent that's true. We want to see schlocky Italian Zombie movies, we want to stampele every freebie we can during the convention weekend but most of all we want to relax and talk with friends, colleagues and new acquaintances.

The first time I went to the British Fantasy Convention I felt like a bit of a loner. To those who have just entered the melee, everyone seems to belong to a social grouping, a band of hobnobbing cliques who won't let you in on their battle plans even for a few moments. Not so, I cry, for I know better now. Despite the order of such occasions, where everyone appears to have a place or function, you may be surprised to know that if you start talking to anyone at the bar or one of the convention rooms they're likely to reciprocate. After all, they are fans who like to talk about their favourite genres and they rarely get the opportunity to do so. Get stuck in, and if you see a famous face go up and talk to it. It probably

won't bite and it might be feeling as lonely as your good self.

My message for this issue is mix... mingle. Almost everything is permissible at the British Fantasy Convention—except perhaps murder, dressing up, and zap guns. Jump in—have fun. But just remember one important rule. It's best not to mix Star Trekkies with Splatterpunks!

On a more sombre note—despite record profits and a still expanding film industry several of the smaller independent film companies are having to reconsider their production and marketing strategies as market share becomes a cut-throat race between the big distributors such as Warners—with *Batman*—and UIP with *Indiana Jones* and *Licence to Kill*.

Two of the most recent casualties are New World Entertainment and Vestron Inc., both of which have shut down, or are selling their film production divisions. New World, a company originally spearheaded by Roger Corman, recently made forty employees redundant in the States as it tried to sell off its theatrical arm. The group also recently sold off the Marvel comic group and, in Britain, intends to concentrate on development of its video arm.

It's a similar story at Vestron International which, despite some success with movies such as *Young Guns*, is shutting down theatrical production. The video business is, indeed, more lucrative than the big risk cinema market, but this type of contraction means that there is less money around for film development.

Even the big distributors are having to fight for market share. The recently released James Cameron movie *The Abyss* did not make the impact of either *Batman* or *Indiana Jones* in its first

week on US theatrical distribution. At an opening \$24 million, the movie will obviously recoup its production costs and then some, but that's less than half the comparable figures on *Batman* and *Indy*. Added to that, Twentieth Century Fox have a market share of 7 percent, compared to current top guns Warner Brothers at 19 and Paramount at 17. The figures are somewhat distorted because of the spread of productions put out by the top two companies and the massive success of *Batman*, but they do show that the film industry is becoming somewhat like the picture of British distribution of wealth: the richest 3 percent of society has 90 percent of it!

The industry now appears to be an unsafe place for small independents and I must say that the situation will continue to worsen as the big distributors get bigger, budgets become comparable to the debts of some Third World countries, and the expensive, blanket hype for the mega-movies squashes the often more creative minnow market.

I am not suggesting that fans desert the big budget movie—that will never happen, anyway—but if a few more 'fans' paid attention to the smaller production companies, who must by now be suffering from voice strain, then perhaps more of these companies would stay afloat, the market could diversify, other potential filmmakers could be given a chance to be creative with more than a ledger book.

Profit is important, but money ain't everything and in a few years, when maybe two or three communications companies have a monopoly on the film business, we could be looking back on the less rigorous system that produced *The Evil*

Dead, Hellraiser and *Street Trash* with much the same expression as that of an archaeologist regarding the dodo in a history book.

John Gilbert



SIGN SUCCESS FOR FANTASY INN

The recent Brian Lumley signing at The Fantasy Inn, Charing Cross Road, London, proved that smaller venues can get a big reputation through word of mouth.

To describe it as one of the most successful 'Inn signings would be an understatement, as the queue for autographed copies of *Necroscope III: The Source* was loooo-n-n-g. A number of professionals, including author R Chetwynd-Hayes, *Nightbreed* publicist Stephen Jones, Pan editor Kathy Gale and American first time novelist Jessica Palmer were also drawn to the scene which turned into an all-nighter when FEAR editor John Gilbert decided to take Brian and his wife/agent Dorothy to a nearby restaurant. A half-shop full of people, and near bedlam, followed!

PAN LAUNCHES GALAXY OF NEW TALENT

Pan Books are to launch a major new line in April 1990. 'Pan decided there were various parts of the list which had not been covered effectively,' explains editor Kathy Gale. 'This included the science fiction, fantasy and horror area;

another was crime and mystery. So I was hired to develop genre fiction.'

The list will launch jointly with Sidgwick and Jackson. Sidgwick will publish hardback and some trade paperbacks; Pan will be publishing mass-market paperbacks. 'The books will be identifiable by their overall design, which will follow through from hard to paperback edition.'

It was decided not to give the list a separate identity. 'They will be Pan books, but we are devising a system of logos—one each for SF, fantasy and horror.'

'We felt there were too many specialised imprints around, with a lot of titles being published in these fields, and didn't want to launch a whole new imprint which the trade might not react to very positively. We also felt that, because we have a good reputation in the industry and the sales team is strong, we didn't want to lose the impact of the name Pan.'

There will be five launch titles, led by **Melanie Rawn's** debut novel, *Dragon Prince*. Others are *Iason Cosmo*, a humorous fantasy by Dan **McGirt**, *First Flight* by **Chris Claremont** and **Dark Voices**, a selection from *The Pan Book of Horror Stories* series.

The remaining title will either be **Brian Stableford's** *Empire of Fear* or a **Charles de Lint** novel.

'At the moment we can't decide which to choose,' Gale says. 'Both would benefit, because any launch title gets a high profile and more sales. On the other hand, I don't want them to be outshone by *Dragon Prince*. In any event, the first five are quite distinct, and representative of the range of the list.'

From May onwards, Pan will be publishing two titles a month. 'But when we have something really big, they'll get a month to themselves, as a kind of special.'

Future titles include the **Asimov/Silverberg** collaborations. The first is due from **Gollancz** next year, with Pan publishing the paperback in 1991, and yearly thereafter. Also upcoming is *The Bazoom Project* and its sequel from **Larry Niven** and **Steven Barnes**.

There will also be an occasional non-fiction entry, including **Douglas E Winter's** *Faces of Fear*, a collection of interviews with horror authors, and a book about **Stephen King**.

'I'm being very fussy about what I take on, which you have to be when building a new list. But I'm still actively on the lookout for material, particularly from name authors, and talented new British writers.' **Stan Nicholls**

UK FANTASY CON SET FOR SUCCESS

The British Fantasy Convention (Birmingham, 8-10 September) has already attracted a huge number of professional guests.

Top of the list are **Stephen Laws**, Britain's guest of honour whose novels include *Ghost Train* and *The Wyrm*, and Amer-

ican guest of honour, **Thomas F Monteleone**, the prolific novelist whose latest book, *Phantasma* has recently been released in paperback by Tor. That most important job, Master of Ceremonies, is taken on by **Brian Lumley** whose latest published novels are *Necroscope III: The Source* and *Hero of Dreams*.

The list does not end there. A regular attendee of the convention is **Ramsey Campbell**, president of the British Fantasy Society Convention. Another regular is **Stephen Gallagher**, author of *Dawn River*, who has recently been negotiating the film and television rights to his string of bestselling novels. **Freda Warington**, whose novel, *The Heavenly Horse From the Outermost West* was a wow at last year's World Convention, is hoping to have as good a time as she did then while **Ian Watson**, author of *The Fireworm*, will be constantly on the look out for the best cuisine in town. **R Chewnd-Hayes**, a prolific author from the golden era of horror fiction whose latest book about *Dracula's* relations is proving popular, will no doubt be a big draw on the regular *Midnight Horror Panel*, while **Guy N Smith** will undoubtedly be there to savour the continuing

success of *Crabs* books which have just been reprinted ... again.

Helbound screenwriter **Peter Atkins** will be back for this, his second convention, while new horror novelist **Mark Morris** will be appearing as a celeb for the first time. Old friends such as authors **John M Ford**, **Adrian Cole** and film publicist **Stephen Jones** - who has until now been heavily involved in making the conventions a success - will also be there. If you are a newcomer, they are probably the best people to latch onto, unless you bump into **Di or Mike Watthen** who are again on the organising committee.

For **FEAR** fans, we'll all be there - that's a threat, not a promise - and there will be two special events which you'll want to attend. The first, an official launch of **FEAR/Transworld's Prime Evil Short Story Competition**, kicks off the convention on Friday; and after the **BFC Awards Banquet** we close the festivities in style with our **FEAR Dead Dog Party**.

If you haven't already booked for **BFC 1989**, we suggest you send an SAE for details to **DI Watthen**, British Fantasy Convention, 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DE, England.

NORTH EASTERN PROMISE

Dillons Bookstore in Newcastle upon Tyne has opened a new 'shop within a shop' devoted to comics, graphic novels, games workshops products and science fiction and fantasy titles. Light Years comic shop is the result of the new boom in teen and adult fantasy sparked by recent releases such as *Batman* and comics like *Viz* ...

The first ever North East sci-fi convention will take place on November 23 at the **Ramside Hall Hotel**, Carrville, Durham. TV stars **Jon Pertwee** and **Colin Baker** are slated to attend and the proceeds from the convention will go to the geriatric unit at **St Margaret's Hospital**, Durham. Contact **The Tardis** in Durham on 091 384 7730 for further details.



An artist's impression of **Dillons** in Newcastle, where a special SF and fantasy shop, *Light Years*, opened on 1 September

LAUGHING STARS IN NEW MOVIE DEAL

Tim Sullivan, star of horror writer **SP Somtow's** first feature film *The Laughing Dead* (see **FEAR** Issue 8), has been chosen to write his first screenplay for new Stateside production company **Aspect**. Co-executive producer **Larry Fine** set the budget for the as yet unnamed project at \$1.7 million and says, with enthusiasm, that: 'I've never seen a writer produce so powerful a script his first time out.'

Director **Richard Marks**, whose credits include the underground movie *Velvet Ghetto*, agrees. 'It's a staggering script. On the one hand it's bursting with wild sensationalism, while on the other it's got a classic Aristotelian structure, with all the pity and terror that implies. I'm planning a startling new look for the picture - primal, brooding, elemental.'

Somtow has also just signed as associate producer. He says, 'It's a lot different from directing. I'm really looking forward to working with **Richard (Marks)**. He really understands the film noir sensibility and how to adapt it to contemporary aesthetics.'

Aspect Pictures also has several other **Sullivan/Somtow** projects in various stages of production, including *Vampire Junction* - by **SP Somtow** - and *The Parasite War* - by **Tim Sullivan**. It's good to see that the independents are still alive and creatively kicking.

BATMAN PLUS

The massive success of *Batman*, both in the US and UK markets, means that production company **Guber-Peters** is much in demand and can, to some extent, name its own projects without fear of being turned down by the money men.

A decision has, however, been made and the company's next project is likely to be based on a **Frederick Pohl** novel, *Man Plus*. The SF story concerns a cyborg - man-machine - and his explorations of the universe; a sort of one-man version of *Star Trek*, though whether it will go down as well as the well known, and much hyped, *Batman* remains to be seen.

NIGHTMARES ON WALL STREET

Jason and Freddy stalk the streets of New York; but are they losing their cutting edge? Philip Nutman reports.



DATELINE: New York City, August 1989 . . .

As the big summer movies wind down, the horrors and late surprises emerge to keep audiences coming back for more, and this year box office action has been decidedly mixed.

Friday the 13th Part 8: Jason Takes Manhattan opened on July 28 in 1,500 cinemas, two weeks prior to A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child. Despite the amusing idea of moving the Crystal Lake killer away from his usual campsite stalking grounds, Jason Takes Manhattan is unquestionably the weakest entry in the series, but it still managed to gross \$6 million in its opening weekend. I've never been a fan of the Friday 13th films and therefore my opinion is biased, but for a more general overview I quizzed some members of the cinema audience with whom I shared the experience of the latest Jason epic.

'I thought it sucked the big one,' said Steve Williamson, a long-time Jason fan from the

Bronx. 'The trailer was better than the movie. Okay, so this one's got the biggest body count of any Friday the 13th flick - but where's the blood? I don't even think the MPAA cut this one 'cause I don't see that they used any gore to start with. If they make another one, I'm not going to waste my time any more. Splatter's dead.'

'It scared me,' said Marie Valdez, a fifteen-year-old from Harlem. 'I couldn't stand the suspense when he (Jason) was stalking the kids on the boat. But I scare easily.'

'I'm glad they took the story away from that camp he's always at. I've seen that story too many times,' stated Ritchie Morita of Brooklyn. 'I thought the idea was fun - kids on a cruise ship with Jason after them, then ending up in New York City. The Times Square stuff was cool. Yeah, I guess I liked it.'

Other people I talked to voiced similar opinions. The general verdict? Mediocre at best. Tony Darnton, a die-hard horror fan from Manhattan, summed it up: 'There's really no point to these films any more. I

mean, I love 'em an' all, but without a story and, most of all, without the gore, there's just no point.'

So much for Jason Takes Manhattan. But is Freddy dead? Nightmare 5 opened to disappointing business on August 11 in 1,600 cinemas, the largest release for any Elm Street saga. The film's opening gross was \$8 million, a dip of 37 percent on last year's smash opening of \$12 million at 1,400 screens with The Dream Master.

My opinion of the film coincides with that of Mike DeLuca, New Line Cinema's VP in charge of development, who feels that the movie 'reflects what's best about the series and what's bad about it - namely that, with shorter production schedules, we're not doing some of the material justice. DeLuca, one of the few executives in Hollywood who reads horror fiction, made this comment during an interview we shall be featuring in a future column focussing on Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw III, which is due to open here on November 3. Although word from the set is mixed concerning the latest cannibal can sequel, David J Schow's first draft script is one of the best reads I've had from Hollywood in many a year.

'Of course, just how much of my material makes it to the screen is anybody's guess right now,' Schow remarked while in New York on business. 'Apparently Jeff Burr, the director (who made The Steppfather 2 prior to Saw III) has been remaking the original movie, which would be great if there had never been a film called The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, or if this was 1974 instead of 1989. But the one thing both New Line and I wanted to do was avoid any reference to Chainsaw II. The story basically ignores anything that took place in the previous sequel. Anyway, I'll tell you more once I know what's happening, although I should add that I hear they've been putting my material back in the script - and that doesn't usually happen.'

Schow is rapidly shaping up to be a hot name in Hollywood, and plans are underway at New Line for him to co-write Hellbent, 'a seven samurai of the living dead story', with DeLuca this fall. In addition, Schow may pen the first draft of A Nightmare on Elm Street 6, and is under consideration to script Lost Boys II for Richard Donner's production company. Busy boy. But fans of his prose needn't worry: Schow has finished The Shift, his second novel, due for Amer-

ican publication in a few months. In the meantime, if you haven't read his first book, The Kill Riff, yet, MacDonald are publishing it in Britain this October.

But back to Freddy.

SPLAT TWINS

Although The Dream Child does, as promised, take Freddy K back into the shadows, giving him a meaner edge and fewer wisecracks, the disappointing box office performance suggests that old pizzaface may be losing his crown as horror's resident monarch of murder. Reviews here have generally been negative, which is nothing new for a horror movie, but a definite downturn for a Nightmare movie, the previous two having generated much good press. One good thing, though, is that Schow's buddies and fellow Splatterpunks, John Skipp and Craig Spector, finally got their first screen credit on the flick. Although their first draft was largely abandoned, the splat twins are credited thus: story by John Skipp, Craig Spector and Leslie Bohem, with Bohem, who rewrote The Horror Show for Sean Cunningham, getting the screenplay credit.

There is no doubt that the latest Freddy fix extravaganza will make a mint, but the word around town is that the dream stalker has been overexposed and is now suffering the consequences. Regardless of this, a second season of the Freddy's Nightmares TV show is currently in the works.

New Line Cinema, however, are diversifying in the horror field. In addition to the above-mentioned Hellbent project, the company are close to finalising a deal with Skipp and Spector on the excellent screenplay of their novel Deadlines. Not ones to rest on their laurels, S&S have formed their own company, Your Picture Here Productions, with their agents, Adele Leone and Richard Monaco. The writers recently finished a screenplay based on The Cleanup, their second novel, which may be the first film to go before the cameras under the company name, while The Light at the End, their first novel, is now not going to be turned into a CBS movie of the week (as was suggested in our interview with the authors back in FEAR Issue 1). Since part of the objective with the production company is to engineer the authors into a directorial position, don't be surprised to see two sets of credits on either movie if financing goes through this winter.

TALES OF THE DEAD

On the subject of Skip and Spector (and these days it seems hard to avoid them, with their increasing media profile and demanding slate of projects), *Book of the Dead*, the zombie anthology they've just edited, has turned out to be one of the hottest-selling horror books of the summer season. The first print run of 125,000 copies of the paperback had almost sold out within two months, and the signed, limited hardcover produced by Mark Ziesing was sold out prior to publication. The regular Ziesing hardcover, retailing for \$21.95 (the first hardback with their names on it) had almost sold out at press time. The book's success means a *Book of the Dead II* is already on the cards and will probably feature an entirely new roster of writers. Loosely based on the world view of the George A Romero zombie trilogy, you can judge it for yourself when Bantam UK release it in Britain later this year. Writers featured in the anthology include Stephen King, Ramsey Campbell, David Schow, Douglas E Winter, Les Daniels, Robert R McCammon, Ed Bryant and Nicholas Royce.

Speaking of Ed Bryant and dead things, thanks to Dave Schow I got the chance to see a preview copy of S P Somtow's *The Laughing Dead*, in which Bryant is one of the many cameoed authors (see Gregory Frost's report in *FEAR* Issue 8). Although rough around the edges, *The Laughing Dead* has a manic energy that recalls *Re-Animator*, and enough blood and violent sexual imagery to upset the BBFC for a few weeks. My favourite scene is the one in which Bryant, who plays a bus driver, has his head crushed by his vehicle, all lovingly detailed in low budget gory, culminating with one of his eyes popping out! No wonder Ed prefers writing to driving... Anyway, I don't expect to see the film uncut in Britain, that's for sure.

SHORT NOTICES

Despite publishers' complaints in the past that anthologies don't sell, it seems that belief has changed with at least six collections currently in the works. For starters, there's *Boarderlands*, a volume of no-holds-barred fiction edited by Thomas F Monteleone (this year's guest of honour at Fantasycon). The book is due out in hardcover from Dark Harvest, and paper via Avon Books and it features new stories by most of the big names and the best of those working in the small press. Also going for taboo areas is *Visions in Viscera*, a grab-bag of gross-

outs from the pens of Nicholas Royce, Shaun Hutson, Ramsey Campbell, Rex Miller and others, though as I was putting this column to bed, editor David Kuehls informed me that the title is undergoing a change.

Visions in Viscera was just too hard a title for Rex Miller's story about constipation and Nicholas Royce's ditty, *The Man who Love Picking His Nose and Fat Women*, he noted in a recent letter, so the exact title of this 'lunch-loser' anthology is up in the air at present, as is a publisher.

Currently on the shelves and worth investigating are *Razored Saddles*, a selection of weird western stories edited by Joe R Lansdale and Pat LoBrutto (from Dark Harvest), and *The Further Adventures of Batman* (Bantam), edited by Martin H Greenberg and including tales by Lansdale, William F Nolan and Isaac Asimov. Greenberg is currently compiling a companion volume of Joker stories, many of which are being authored by horror writers.

On a similar note, Arcane Inc, the Washington DC-based comic and art publisher, are preparing to unleash *Fly in My Eye II* within the next couple of months. Arcane (who were profiled in *FEAR* Issue 8) are now having their product distributed by Eclipse Comics, publishers of *Tapping the Vein*, the Barker anthology of graphic *Book of Blood* adaptations. Arcane have recently moved, too. Their new address is: 1926 17th Street NW 1, Washington DC 20009.

Finally, some recommendations.

First up has to be James Cameron's *The Abyss*, the epic underwater action adventure of all time. It's everything we have come to expect from the writer-director since *The Terminator*: tense to the point of exhausting the audience, technically polished to the degree whereby - in the words of *Rolling Stone* critic Peter Travers - Cameron elevates the adventure movie to the level of art, with a strong human core that grounds the slam-bang excitement. Sure, it is *Close Encounters* at the bottom of the Cayman Trough, but who cares? See *The Abyss* on the biggest screen possible. I caught the film at its world premiere on the immense screen of RKO Radio City Music Hall here in the Big Apple, and it's one of those experiences that will last for years.

In complete contrast to *The Abyss* is *The Uninvited*, an irredeemably stupid horror thriller from hack director Greydon Clark, destined to appear on video soon. This turkey stars Alex Cord, George Kennedy and Clu Gulager in a tale of three Wall Street criminals on board a luxury boat with a bunch of annoying teenagers and a cat possessed by a 'toxic twin' who emerges from its throat to rip the cat to shreds. The pitiful affair made me laugh so much that my sides hurt just thinking about it.

Then watch out for John McNaughton's terribly disturbing *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, a low budget film of tremendous power, loosely based on real life killer Henry Lee Lucas. But more on this one next month.

NEW TALENT IN DEMAND

Dear FEAR

I am writing to you about the short stories featured in the August issue. I thought they were absolutely brilliant!! I thought it was a good idea to let new writers have their work shown, and those definitely deserved to have them printed. Do you think you could make this a regular feature in your magazine?

I particularly loved *Fish Bait*, and hope Louise Hamilton does well in the future.
Sue Paton, Larkhall.

Yes, Sue, the short story is a regular feature in *FEAR* from now on. Yay!!!

FEAR AND CHIPS

Dear FEAR

Eight marvellous issues of your glorious fantasy, horror and sci-fi magazine I have shared with thousands of other keen readers, your smooth silky pages, astoundingly clear typeface, hi-gloss covers and brilliant photography. Indeed a masterpiece of its genre. A collector's item *FEAR*, The Magazine. But alas, all good things must come to an end.

Reading up to page 34 of Issue 8, I discovered to my horror the next 24 backed pages to be made of newspaper, processed mush. I pondered donating my treasured *FEAR* to my local chip shop. Imagine - eating your greasy fish 'n' chips from this paper-mache.

I remember flaunting my *FEAR* along the high street of my town, proud to be a *FEAR* fan. I now creep along, back against the wall, hidden in shadow with my *FEAR* concealed in an unmarked paper bag.

Although I welcomed with keen enthusiasm my *FEAR* Fiction Extra for which I've often craved more on many a lonely night - I loathe and detest this drastic drop in paper quality. Please bring back the glossy paper which has become the trademark of our mag and may our tormented souls be laid to rest.
Bjorn, Strathaven, Lanarkshire.

Well, as the saying goes, you can't have it both ways. The general response to the changes in *FEAR* issue 8 has been favourable and in line with our thinking. After our initial monthly issue, people complained because of the drop in pagination. We thought and sought, and finally came up with a way to increase the number of pages without incurring the bankruptcy. What you see is the result and, to those who have complained, let me assure you that as *FEAR*'s popularity increases so shall the number of glossy pages. Simple economics, really. Yes, so it is written.

LACK OF LUMLEY

Dear FEAR

About two years ago I was lucky enough to read (what I consider to be) one of the finest novels of the decade, *Necroscope* by Brian

FILMS IN PRODUCTION

DARK SIDE [A] Entertainment

Producers: Jaime Sohachski, Jerry Kutner. Director: Adolfo Martinez Solares. Screenplay: Martinez Solares, Dan Peterson, Gilberto Martinez Solares. Starring: Martin Kove, Nick Cassavetes.

THE HAUNTING OF MAURELLA New Horizons

Producer: Roger Corman. Director: Jim Wynorski. Screenplay: Jim Wynorski, RJ Robertson.

DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE LWT/ABC

Producers: David Wickes, Nick Elliot, Gerry Abrams, Patricia Carr. Director/Screenplay: David Wickes. Starring: Michael Caine, Cheryl Ladd, Joss Ackland, Ronald Pickup, Lionel Jeffries.

MERMAIDS Orion

Producers: Patrick Palmer, Wally Pfister, Laren Lloyd. Director: Frank Oz. Screenplay: June Roberts. Starring: Cher, Winona Ryder.

MINDWALK Mindwalk Productions

Producers: Klaus Lintschinger, Adrianna Cohen. Director: Bernd Capra. Screenplay: Bernd Capra, Floyd Byars. Cast: Liv Ullmann, Sam Waterston, John Heard.

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM Bandcompany

Producer: Charles Band. Director: Stuart Gordon. Screenplay: Dennis Paoli. Starring: Peter O'Toole, Sherilyn Fenn, Billy Dee Williams, Jeffrey Combs.



Here it is again; the column that thrives on your literary blood. Send those necrotic notes, disgusting diatribes and macabre meanderings to **RAISING THE DEAD, FEAR, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB.**

Lumley.

Now, as I live in a fairly small town, I find it hard to get a varied selection of the type of books I enjoy, namely horror and fantasy, and have never seen another novel by Brian.

I must admit, I'd never heard of **FEAR** magazine, but one day, as I was buying my daily paper, I noticed the words 'Brian Lumley' and 'Necroscope' screaming at me from the depths of the magazine shelf.

I bought the mag and immediately realised it was, for me, perfect. I was also delighted to learn that there was not one but two other books in the *Necroscope* saga and thought I would write to you in the hope that you would let me know how to get hold of these and any other books by Brian Lumley.

Stephen Hay, Stevenston, Ayrshire

The Necroscope series is in print and more info can be obtained from Grafton Paperback, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA. Also, Hero of Dreams can be obtained from Headline Book Publishing plc, Cash Sales Department, PO Box 11, Falmouth, Cornwall TR10 9EN for £2.99 plus 60p p&p.

FILM CENSORS SHOULD BE CERTIFIED

Dear FEAR

By now you will undoubtedly know that *Batman* is the first film to be censored with the 12 certificate. Why, I ask you, with our already ridiculed censorship laws are we being subjected to this? A new certificate is totally unnecessary, apart from anything else, it denies a lot of kids the chance to see the film they've been waiting months to view on the big screen as, very often, the (often cut) video version doesn't compensate. Hopefully there will be enough fuss for the censors to retract this stupid new pigeon-holing certificate, but of course that is probably just a dream.

A Morgan, Hornsea, N Humber-side

We totally agree, but may I remember that many readers who replied to our censorship poll in Issue 1 thought that there should be a 12 rating. Such a rating does, however, mean that films that have, until recently, fallen between U and PG are further compartmentalised. Fortunately, the BBFC seems to have been going easy on borderline films of late. It was suggested that *Batman* might get a 15 Certificate but the BBFC saw fit not to waste the PG tag but to allow twelve-year-olds to see the

movie without guidance. There are two sides to this argument – we just happen to be on the side of less red tape but still providing protection for those in society who need it.

DEAD LETTERS

Dear FEAR

As much as I find your magazine both intelligent and entertaining, I feel it is sadly lacking in one aspect; unfortunately the result of this deficit is made all too apparent by the contents to the letters page. A quick perusal through your back issues shows that the majority of correspondence to your mag tends to fall mainly into two categories: praise for the above average publication, and suggestions for possible future articles. Fair enough, but there is a distinct shortfall of thought-provoking missives and I'm afraid that **FEAR** itself has to bear much of the blame for this situation.

Issue 1 featured an article on censorship; in the following editions were opinions that readers had been inspired to express. Since then, however, there has been no article that has taken any significant moral or philosophical stance and, in consequence, a conspicuous lack of challenging debate between your readers.

A lively letters page can only be good for **FEAR**; I imagine that your readers fall into the more perceptive and discerning category of horror and fantasy enthusiasts, so there is no reason why the page devoted to 'raising the dead' should not do precisely that.

And while I'm here – congratulations on an excellent magazine; and how about an article on Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*? **Paul Foy, Glasgow**

Point taken, Paul, but we can only print the responses we get. 'C'mon folks, what about you popping your opinions about Tom Savini's criticism of Gore (Issue 8), or Doug Winter's view of horror (this issue)? Let's make this page live! (?)'

And, while we're at it, expect an *Anne Rice* interview just as soon as she's finished redecorating her house in New Orleans.

LACK OF EMPATHY

Dear FEAR

Gary Gerani and myself, screenwriters of Stan Winston's first feature as director, *Pumpkinhead* (aka *Vengeance: The Demon*), read and enjoyed your recent profile of Stan the Man. However, we were surprised to find a quote attributed to Stan, to the effect that he included 'the parts about the demon being psychically connected to Ed Harley'.

For the record, long before Stan was ever shown our first draft by the film's talented producers, it contained this element almost exactly as it now appears in the finished film.

FEAR is an enlightening genre publication. Keep 'em coming. **Mark Patrick Carducci, North Hollywood, California, USA.**

Sorry for any misapprehension of credit, but we think that Stan probably meant he included the story element within the finished film not that he necessarily created it. It's a fabulous film guys. Please take a bow.

FIGHTING TALK

Dear FEAR

With reference to Paul Rafferty's totally unjust comments on Oliver Frey in Issue 9, I'd like to voice my own opinions.

Paul, haven't I seen that image of Freddy Krueger in countless other magazines? I've seen quite a few pictures of Freddy in that same pose. Your picture is so cliché-ridden, whereas Frey's works are always outstanding and, above all, original! The man has such a wonderful imagination. You probably don't realise that Frey also does the artwork for several computer magazines each month. If you could work under such pressure and still come up with the goods, I'd probably respect you for it.

Lastly, thank God you (dear FEAR) didn't print Mr Rafferty's picture in colour, or his ego would almost certainly have bloated larger than Robert Englund's bank-balance (no offence, Robert, you've done a fine job, but I honestly believe Freddy must be laid to rest for a couple of years).

Tim Gallagher

Dear FEAR

I would like to take this opportunity to add my comments to the letter signed by 'CD Ward' re: the Clive Barker debate.

Firstly, although I have to agree, somewhat, with his comments, the truth of the matter is that Clive Barker is a very popular writer/film director at present. Obviously a magazine of **FEAR**'s ilk will continue to publish articles on him for a long time to come (assuming he stays in the horror field). Agreed, he does seem to crop up in most of the issues to date, but, as stated, he is immensely popular.

The only quibble I have regarding his written work is that, although the horror aspect is chilling, the rest seems to be rather plodding and used almost as 'padding' to link the horrible bits. I make no apologies for this statement – it's how I see it and no doubt there are thousands of people out there who will disagree.

Re *Hellraiser*. That was, and still is, along with its follow up, one of the best films to be made for a long while (and British, too). Compared to all the low budget,

quick-buck, garishly packaged films/videos that promise so much but don't deliver, the *Hellraiser* duo is a best. The Cenobite creations were imaginative and chilling, save for the Butterball who, I suspect, was added as an afterthought, a slightly humorous touch to balance the other three.

Doug Bradley's *Pinhead* is very effective, and the phrase 'or we will tear your soul apart' is delivered with such calculating certainty that it makes Ken Russell's same line in *Tommy* pale into insignificance.

As to the remarks pertaining to the Cthulhu mythos... Well, I think if I read one more article on Lovecraft's overblown, oppressive babblings, then I shall scream! His field of vision was too narrow, too stifling, full of Victorian repression and sexual hang-ups. Tentacled, vaginal imagery indeed. Laughable.

As to the remark made about 'spotty' individuals with emotional problems who want to work in the prosthetics industry... so bloody what? Where else can they write for information? *Gardeners' Weekly*? I would like to add that I have an interest in 'horror' make-up, and I'm thirty-six and not retarded, emotionally or otherwise.

As to Mr Gilbert, it's a pleasure to have somebody who takes a healthy interest in the genre. Having an unbiased review does help and also saves money on hiring/publishing. Adding personal comments also makes for a better read.

Finally, I'd like to say that **FEAR** is far superior to *Gorezone* and *Fangoria*, who seem to think that because a film has buckets of blood and shredded bodies in it, it's brilliant. Bullshit.

Mik Bridgeman, Exeter

Dear FEAR

I am a spotty, emotionally retarded teenager who wants to work in the prosthetics industry.

I'm not really, but I write this in the hope that it will deter people like 'CD Ward' (Raising the Dead, Issue 9) from reading this magazine.

Although this chap has an opinion and should be allowed to express it, he is such a pompous prat that there is probably a place waiting for him at the BBFC.

I feel that John Gilbert is a competent editor and, in my opinion, his views and comments are valid and I trust his judgement in most things. In my opinion, **FEAR** is well-balanced in fact and fiction both in the contents of the magazine and in each review.

I would like to point out that I am not a member of the Clive Barker fan club, nor has this letter been written by John Gilbert to show how popular he is. Also, I have the courage to put my real name to this letter, unlike others I could mention.

D Pierce, Bolton, Lancs

FEAR

FEAR ISSUE No. 11 ON SALE September

FEAR MEETS THE EXORCIST

- **WRITER WILLIAM** Peter Blatty and star George C Scott give FEAR the lowdown on what is likely to be next year's most controversial movie.
- **DWIGHT LITTLE**, director of the Phantom of the Opera's latest film incarnation, exclusively spills the blood on Robert 'Freddy' Englund's portrayal of the mad musician and his tragic love for opera singer Christine. Andrew Lloyd Webber eat ya heart out!
- **GALE ANN Hurd** dives into the FEAR grotto to discuss The Abyss, Alien Nation, The Terminator . . . and she has some shocking news!!
- **A NIGHTMARE** on Elmstreet V: Splatterpunk! John Skipp and Craig Spector tell the strange story of the script that New Line turned down. Not just another Freddy interview, we FEARfully swear!
- **STEPHEN LAWHEAD**, fantasy author of the Pendragon Cycle and The Dragon King Trilogy, talks about myth and magic.

ADD TO THIS

- **MORE ON** our Prime Evil Short Story Competition, news, previews, reviews, and another packed fiction extra and you've got . . .



- **CHRISTOPHER FOWLER**, author of the bestselling novel Roofworld, gives us a taste of his talent for short story writing with Jumbo Portions.

THE NEXT ISSUE
Dedicated to all blood donors